THE Nation.

CPR FOR THE PUBLIC OPTION
CHRISTOPHER HAYES

J.G. BALLARD'S COMPLETE STORIES
CHINA MIÉVILLE

BIG TOBACCO & THE HISTORIANS

A TALE OF SEDUCTION AND INTIMIDATION
JON WIENER

MARCH 15, 2010
TheNation.com

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Letters

AMERICA'S SECRET AFGHAN PRISONS
DEMOCRACY INC.
THE SUPREME COURT DECISION AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT
THE EDITORS
PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS

'We the Corporations, in Order to…'

Weaverville, N.C.
Your lead editorial "Democracy Inc." [Feb. 15] rightly points out the need for a constitutional amendment to prevent corporations from buying elections. An Angus Reid poll showed that 65 percent of Americans disagree with the Supreme Court's *Citizens United v. FEC* campaign finance decision. The nationwide revulsion at this abhorrent decision creates an opportunity to bring about a *series* of amendments to truly make our democracy of, by and for the people.
Fred Flaxman

Murrieta, Calif.
The *Citizens United* decision may be the final nail in democracy's coffin. I appreciate that *The Nation* is "committed to the struggle" against this atrocity, but a constitutional amendment is very unlikely (remember the Equal Rights Amendment?).
Jon Thingvold

Folsom, Calif.
And so the Republic dies. The Supreme Court shores up the doctrines that money is speech and corporations are people. Those with the most money will have the strongest speech rights, making corporations supercitizens and the rest of us second-class citizens. The arc of history likely leads us to a corporatist state, like Italy, 1922-45; Spain, 1936-73; and Germany, 1933-45. Another label for it is "fascism." We can keep the Constitution as a historical document in our archives to be viewed but essentially irrelevant, quaint.
Mark L. Thron

Davis, Calif.
Gnashing of teeth. Rending of garments. Wailing to the heavens, as you go after the five GOPer Supremes and their siren song for oligarchy on the half shell. Nice.

Now it is up to us to organize and fight. First up: frame the issue. Real people are what the Bill of Rights is for, not legalistic fictions. As the Real Rights for Real People movement, pass bills that define corporations as outside the Bill of Rights (how does freedom of religion apply to Goldman Sachs?); get shareholders to file suits against officers who sign political contribution checks from corporate coffers; boycott corporations and media outlets running corporate political ads. If Democrats are not to wimp out—or be wiped out—real battle must be joined. Or we'll have another generation lost in the desert.
M.J. Shepley

Eureka, Calif.
The *Citizens United* decision legalizes corporate bribery of candidates, but the problem goes beyond that. Courts have overturned thousands of laws enacted to protect elections, workers, health, safety and the environment, claiming that such laws violate the constitutional rights of corporations. The late Howard Zinn observed, "Liberals get excited about things like the *Citizens United* ruling as if they signal a dramatic change. No, the corporations ran our elections before the decision and will do so now—just with a fig leaf of 'legality.' The designation of corporations as 'persons' is just proof of how our legal system, the Constitution, the courts have always been tools of the wealthy classes." A broad-based coalition of grassroots groups and national organizations has launched the Campaign to Legalize Democracy to fight this. In the first weeks since the decision, more than 55,000 folks joined us at movetoamend.org. To be part of the growing grassroots rebellion, join us online or call (707) 269-0984.
David Cobb

Saying No to the Protection Racket

Portland, Ore.
I found Christopher Hayes's "System Failure" [Feb. 1] soothing in an odd sort of way. It correctly diagnosed the tension in my neck after hours of phone-banking—on yet another Robert Michels–style "noble, endless, Sisyphean endeavor." Hayes helps

(continued on page 24)

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A Troubled Surge

It will be a while, the US military tells us, before the success or failure of its Afghan offensive in Marja can be determined with any certainty. That says it all: a superpower will require weeks to seize control of just a single town in a vast country of thousands of villages and valleys. Centcom commander Gen. David Petraeus calls the Marja action "just the initial operation of what will be a twelve- to eighteen-month campaign" aimed at wresting power from the Taliban. It's fair to ask, of course, Isn't that what they have been trying to do for eight long years?

EDITORIAL

The Obama administration says that this time it's different—that the addition of 30,000 troops to the long-running conflict will turn the tide against the Taliban. The surge, Obama's advisers have long argued, will reverse the insurgents' momentum and persuade the Taliban's foot soldiers, and perhaps some of their leaders, to come to the bargaining table. General Petraeus tells us to expect high casualties among US and NATO forces.

Leave aside, for a moment, the problem that adding US forces creates more enemies, not fewer (dozens of civilians have been killed in recent US airstrikes, further enraging the Afghan public). The fact is, clearing, holding and building new social and political structures in Afghanistan, village by village and valley by valley, will take many years, if it can be done at all. Stretching ahead is a decades-long nation-building project that can't be sustained politically, militarily or financially.

As we go to press, the US death toll is nearing 1,000. More than 600 NATO troops have died in a conflict that is increasingly opposed in Europe and straining the alliance; indeed, the Dutch government recently collapsed because of widespread antiwar sentiment. More than eight years into the war, neither the Afghan army nor the police are very functional. The warlord-ridden, corrupt government of President Karzai, returned to power last year after a rigged vote, has little credibility. And Afghanistan's primitive economy, heavily dependent on the drug industry, will be troubled for decades. (One development to watch is the possibility that Pakistan, after decades of fostering, arming and training the Taliban, may be coming around. In recent weeks Pakistan has helped nab several insurgent leaders and shadow governors, and it appears that it is snatching up Taliban by the hundreds fleeing across the Afghan border.)

For Marja to be of any lasting significance, it must be followed quickly by a political settlement, regional diplomacy and implementation of effective Afghan governance. Otherwise, it will merely be a fleeting counterinsurgency footprint wiped away before long by a returning Taliban tide—and thus a testament to the futile sacrifice of American lives and resources for an ill-defined goal of the administration's Af-Pak strategy.

All of this should be fertile territory for exploration in hearings on Capitol Hill. At the height of the war in Iraq, Democrats hectored President Bush with the question, What's your exit strategy? It's time for Congress to ask Obama the same question. March promises to bring a revival of peace activism. Progressive Democrats of America has launched a "Healthcare Not Warfare" campaign, and, joined by Code Pink and other groups, it has started a "Brown Bag Lunch Vigil" at Congressional offices across the country to educate politicians and the public about the costs of war. A revived US antiwar movement that unites with the growing one in Europe would be a powerful force for a negotiated solution and a drawdown of forces.

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Broken ICE

COMMENT

In January, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced that by February 26 it would be transferring roughly 250 detainees from the privately run Varick Detention Center in Manhattan to the Hudson correctional center in Kearny, New Jersey. About 12,000 people annually, mostly New Yorkers who would be held at the Varick center, will now be distributed to facilities outside the city. ICE claims it is making the transfer to provide "outdoor recreation space and visitation services," but civil rights advocates paint a darker picture.

"We view this as a lose-lose situation," says Udi Ofer of the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU), which, along with numerous other New York civil rights organizations, is disturbed that ICE is shifting people from one intolerable facility to another and not releasing them. The groups also worry that the move will deprive the Varick inmates of their free legal services.

The conditions at the Varick center were certainly dismal. On February 16, following months of requests and an ACLU letter on behalf of the *The Nation* and the investigative fund of The Nation Institute, ICE granted its only media tours of the facility, allowing confirmation of complaints in a September 2008 petition from Varick inmates. The dorms are packed with rows of narrow beds, fifty in all; the law library has dated resources; there is no privacy; and there is no natural light, ever.

The agents hosting the tour seemed embarrassed and emphasized the upcoming transfer as we looked through a long hall window at men slouching, feet on the floor, using their beds as backless chairs. The men, most in their 20s to 30s, were wearing tan and orange uniforms, color-coded to match their criminal histories; many in Varick have no arrest record. (No one locked up in an ICE facility is charged with a crime. Any criminal sentence has been served; most are pursuing claims in immigration courts.)

A new report by the NYCLU documents poor medical care, abuse by guards and inadequate meals. The same problems were described in the 2008 petition, from "201 Varick Street 4th floor," which stated that although inmates were given a Detainee Handbook, "almost nothing is followed" and "if we try to put a complaint we are threatened to be moved to worse facilities," maybe even Hudson. Although ICE is citing "visitation" as a reason for the transfer from Varick, Hudson visitation practices violate ICE detention standards.

In June 2008, three months before the Varick petition was released, ICE inmates at Hudson had penned their own petition. It began by noting that they had already been punished for two earlier petitions, one describing someone dying "due to reckless medical treatment" and another publicizing their "inhumane treatment."

Unlike the Bureau of Prisons, ICE operates and supervises its 350 jails without regulations, only voluntary "standards," an anomaly civil rights attorneys find appalling. "If you're going to be one of the largest jailers in the world, it is a good use of your time to create enforceable regulations," says Amy Gottlieb, director of immigrant rights for the American Friends Service Committee in the New York area.

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Noted.

PAUL'S PAC? The recent **Conservative Political Action Conference** (CPAC) promised to give Washington a sense of the sentiments energizing the angry right-wing populists who are supposedly transforming not just the GOP but the American political landscape. And it did. But the signal sent by the conferees wasn't the one pundits and Republican elites expected. Asked to name a favorite candidate for the presidency in 2012, the delegates voted by a wide margin (31 percent) for **Ron Paul**, who opposes the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, the Patriot Act and Wall Street's "free trade" agenda, and who is perhaps best known as a relentless critic of collusion between central bankers and the elites of both parties.

Paul, the Republican-Libertarian hybrid who so upset former New York Mayor **Rudy Giuliani** during the 2008 Republican presidential debates, easily beat **Mitt Romney** (22 percent), **Sarah Palin** (7 percent) and the rest of the 2012 prospects. Paul's no liberal; he would actually shut down most of the federal government. But neither is he a talking-points conservative like Palin, who has owned the spotlight over the past few months. He's an outlier within the mainstream conservative movement and the GOP.

The CPAC straw poll, which attracted 2,395 participants (by far the highest number at any CPAC session), contained no good news for **Barack Obama**. Only 2 percent of those surveyed approved of the president. But the news wasn't all that great for the GOP establishment, either. Thirty-seven percent disapproved of Republicans in Congress. And a plurality—44 percent—rejected Republican National Committee chair **Michael Steele**.

The results are telling. The anger on the right won't necessarily translate into excitement about Republicans like Romney, Palin or Steele. Even CPAC keynoter **Glenn Beck** was disapproved of by 27 percent of those present. Yet, for the most part, coverage of the CPAC gathering focused on tried-and-true Republicans. An Associated Press report on presidential campaigning at the conference failed to mention Paul; the *USA Today* story published after the release of the straw poll results was all about Romney. The real headline, missed by most of the media, is that the anger of the populist right is complex, nuanced and directed not just at Obama but at a lot of mainstream Republicans as well. JOHN NICHOLS

PUBLIC OPTIONS: In loose concert with similar groups across the nation, on a brilliant sunny Saturday in February a line of healthcare reform–minded New Yorkers marched across the Brooklyn Bridge flaunting signs and chanting calls for action on legislation stalled in Congress. There were only about 400 of us, ranging from toddlers on shoulders to seniors on canes, and many 20s and 30s in the middle. (So where were you?)

The marchers, who represented twenty-five organizations, including **Healthcare for America Now**, **SEIU**, **MoveOn**, **National Physicians Alliance** and many New York–based groups, headed for the downtown Manhattan headquarters of **WellPoint**, the nation's largest health benefits company, which was recently in the news for imposing staggering rate hikes. Chants and signs included "Get it done/Get it right" and "Let's finish Teddy's fight/Healthcare is a human right." A MoveOn guy we talked to during a comfort stop at Starbucks said his organization and others have been meeting with members of the state Congressional delegation and are buoyed by recent expressions of support for the public option by Senators **Kirsten Gillibrand** and **Chuck Schumer**.

In a rally in front of a giant, blank-looking black and chrome-slashed slab at One Liberty Plaza, a series of speakers blasted WellPoint for putting profits before people, even as 45,000 die each year for lack of insurance. In early February, the corporation's California subsidiary, **Anthem Blue Cross**, announced that it would raise premiums as much as 39 percent. WellPoint's net income for 2009 totaled $4.7 billion; adjusted net income was $2.9 billion, compared with $2.5 billion in 2008. In 2009 it spent $4.7 million on lobbying. Meanwhile, 2.6 million New Yorkers younger than 65 have no insurance. In the past decade, insurance premiums for family coverage in New York State have climbed 92 percent, while median income went up 14 percent. Health reform groups will hold a rally in Washington on March 9 to challenge the **Association of Health Insurance Providers**, which is meeting to plan how it will next thwart reform. RICHARD LINGEMAN

TAX EVASION: In 2007 America's wealthiest households reported their highest incomes and lowest tax rates on record, according to recently released **IRS** data going back to 1992. The average adjusted gross income of the 400 highest earners rose by 31 percent from 2006 to 2007—from $263 million to nearly $345 million—but their income tax rates dropped to 16.6 percent, continuing a decline in rates since 1995 when they were at 30 percent. The fall in average tax rates for top earners, along with rising income, is largely the consequence of capital gains tax cuts passed by **George W. Bush** in 2003 and **Bill Clinton** in 1997.

Top earners made two-thirds of their income in 2007 from capital gains, currently taxed at 15 percent under the Bush cuts. Clinton reduced the capital gains tax to 20 percent. In 1992, when the tax was 28 percent, capital gains accounted for about a third of gross income among top earners. Salaries and wages were just 6.5 percent of gross income for the top 400 households in 2007; they were 26 percent in 1992.

Total adjusted gross income for the top 400 in 2007 was nearly $138 billion, or 1.6 percent of all national income. That's three times the share recorded in 1992.

For the great majority not in these rarefied brackets, the numbers are grim. As tax analyst **David Cay Johnston** wrote on Tax.com, which first reported on the data, "Since 1992, the bottom 90 percent of Americans have seen their incomes rise by 13 percent in 2009 dollars, compared with an increase of 399 percent for the top 400." FREDERICK DEKNATEL

ONE MAN'S TERRORISM… The **Wall Street Journal**'s headline for a news story on **Andrew Joseph Stack**, the Texas man who flew his plane into an IRS office in Austin, killing himself and IRS manager **Vernon Hunter**: "Tax Protestor Crashes Plane Into IRS Office."

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This lack of accountability explains why a century of hunger strikes, petitions, reports, commissions, lawsuits, news coverage and promises are only leading to more hunger strikes, petitions, reports, commissions, lawsuits, news coverage and promises.

In 2007 several civil rights groups signed a petition demanding that the Department of Homeland Security codify its operations. The Bush and Obama administrations ignored the petition until a federal court ordered a response, at which point DHS rejected regulations, explaining that they "would be laborious, time-consuming, and less flexible." Abiding by the rule of law does make life "less flexible" for all agencies—but the absence of regulations for detention operations has meant environments that are oppressive, arbitrary and even deadly.

Congress could pass a bill requiring enforceable detention standards. But Senator Chuck Schumer—a key player on immigration issues who recently decried the transfer from Varick to the Hudson jail as a "crushing blow" to their "due process rights"—will not be requiring detention regulations in his committee's forthcoming bill. "Schumer is playing this safe political game and not recognizing we have a gulag happening," says Gottlieb.

Despite the difficulties of challenging a secretive outlaw agency, attorneys in New York have had some successes. Volunteer lawyers have been able to rectify medical and other detention-related complaints on behalf of their clients and won release for people who would otherwise be deported. Advocacy by Make the Road New York and the New Sanctuary Coalition has led to ICE agents wearing uniforms and identifying themselves when interviewing state prison inmates. (Previously ICE agents wore plain clothes, and inmates confused them with public defense attorneys.) Ex–New Yorker Cecil Harvey received a $145,000 settlement in September after Rikers Island jail held him illegally on behalf of ICE. The complaint was drafted by the New York University Immigrant Rights Law Clinic and is being used as a template for similar complaints nationwide.

During the Varick tour, I was shown a part of ICE's operation there that is not changing, a dimly lit, gritty booking area adjacent to five concrete holding cells with open toilets, each cell designed for four to twelve occupants. New York field office director Christopher Shanahan said that people would be brought there for intake interviews and held for less than twelve hours, during which time they would not be allowed to meet with their attorneys. Peter Markowitz, director of the Immigration Justice Clinic at Cardozo Law School, called the policy "illegal and horrific," adding that "whisking New Yorkers out of town to far-off detention facilities in Texas and Alabama will deprive many immigrants of their one and only chance to meet with their attorneys."

The signatories of the 2008 Hudson petition wrote, "We are submitting this new petition…with hope of assistance to stop this nasty undeclared war against immigrants.… DHS, which was created after the tragedy of 9/11 to protect and prevent further attacks from foreign enemies [has turned] into a deporting machine without morality or principles—an army against immigrants."

Marion Munk, a Piscataway artist, took care of mail for the New Jersey Civil Rights Defense Committee, now inactive, to whom the petition was addressed. They sent letters to the signatories. "All but a few were returned," says Munk. "The petition writers had been transferred or deported." JACKIE STEVENS

Jackie Stevens, a political theorist, is the author of the recently published States Without Nations: Citizenship for Mortals *(Columbia). She also publishes a blog,* States Without Nations.

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

Alexander Haig Dies; Said He Was in Charge After Reagan Was Shot

We say farewell to Alexander Haig.
His I'm-in-charge-here speech laid one big egg.
By law, in fact, he wasn't then in charge—
And that is writ in his obits quite large.
Though Haig had many serious roles to play,
We still associate him with that day.
Of one rule he displayed no understanding:
Commanders, too, can just be too commanding.

CPR for the Public Option

I'll admit that like almost everyone in this town, I thought the public option was dead. In late October when Joe Lieberman announced he'd filibuster any bill that included it, I figured it was time to conduct an autopsy (cause of death: blows administered in quick succession by an obstinate insurance industry and "centrist" senators), commence the mourning process and move on.

But now, improbably, the cadaver is twitching and kicking, threatening to push its way out of the casket. As of this writing, twenty-four Democratic senators have signed a letter calling on majority leader Harry Reid to include a public option in the package of changes the Senate will pass through reconciliation. The list of signers isn't just made up of the usual progressive suspects; the letter was written by Colorado's Michael Bennet and signed by New York's Kirsten Gillibrand—neither known for a commitment to the progressive base—and has attracted the support of conservative Democrat Tim Johnson and the extremely politically savvy Chuck Schumer.

This doesn't mean it's going to work. Jay Rockefeller, who had advocated strongly for the public option when it was being debated in the Senate, dismissed the possibility of passing the public option through reconciliation, and the White House quite ostentatiously omitted it from its proposed changes to the Senate bill. Their lack of support has to be read as opposition.

And yet, the public option is like the Terminator of progres-

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sive politics: every time the insurance industry and conservative Democrats think they've killed it, it just keeps coming.

Why does it persist? First, people like it. Despite relentless scaremongering about government-run healthcare, poll after poll shows that among independents and progressives, it's one of the most popular—if not *the* most popular—parts of the entire healthcare reform package. Second, it's good policy. It would mandate competition, reduce costs and cut the deficit by $104 billion over ten years.

But in the dysfunctional institution that is the US Congress, popular and good aren't enough to ensure a proposal's passage, or even its discussion. What's really kept the public option alive has been the remarkably spirited, disciplined and creative work of a variety of progressive groups.

Take this latest iteration. It started with a few activists at the start-up Progressive Change Campaign Committee. PCCC has been around only a little more than a year, but it's already had a significant impact, thanks to its smart tactical approach and very small footprint. Started by former MoveOn organizers, the group has a staff of nine and, like MoveOn, raises all its money from members online.

In the wake of Scott Brown's victory in Massachusetts and the chaotic, shellshocked response from Democrats, PCCC saw a vacuum and moved to fill it. "People didn't know what to do," says PCCC's Stephanie Taylor, "so we showed them through polls, which is the language they understand." PCCC commissioned polls of Massachusetts Obama voters who had voted for Brown, as well as voters in ten frontline Democratic Congressional districts, and found widespread support for the public option in each. In concert with PCCC and its partners Democracy for America (DFA) and Credo Action, two freshman Democratic House members, Jared Polis and Chellie Pingree, wrote a letter calling on Reid to include the public option.

"If the Senate *is* going to pass something with a straight up-or-down vote," asks Taylor, "shouldn't it be the best bill possible? The one that's best politically and that's best policy-wise?"

On January 27, PCCC, DFA and Credo sent news of the letter to their e-mail lists and urged members to contact their representatives. They set up WhipCongress.com, where users could track who had signed on, and within eight days the letter had attracted 120 signatories in Congress. "There's no doubt we would have had far less than 120 signers without the netroots community," says Polis. "The phones were really ringing off the hook in members' offices." Not only did progressives use constituent contact to push members to support the public option; they also, Taylor notes, went out of their way to reward their "heroes," raising more than $26,000 each for Polis, Pingree and Alan Grayson, who appeared at an event delivering petitions to Reid.

They then turned their attention to the Senate. According to PCCC's Adam Green, Polis reached out to fellow Coloradan Michael Bennet, who had been a supporter of the public option. Bennet released the letter along with signatures from Jeff Merkley, Sherrod Brown and Gillibrand. Once again, the groups sent the letter out to their members and urged them to whip the Senate, and within a week of its release, it has gained twenty-four co-sponsors. Once again PCCC and DFA rewarded those who took the lead, raising $40,000 for Gillibrand and $68,000 for Bennet. Reid now says he'll include a public option in reconciliation if he can get the votes—and White House support. But the White House's silence has been deafening. That's at least part of the reason why, by the time you read this, it's quite possible the public option will be dead, once again.

But PCCC's success in reopening the debate highlights some of the emerging approaches in online organizing. Much of the recent online-based progressive infrastructure was built during the Bush years and developed effective strategies for opposition. It's been a steep learning curve this past year as these groups wrestle with reinventing those techniques to push legislation, especially when it comes to finding allies in Congress and then working with them. "I think this campaign was a really good example of the importance of a strong relationship between folks on the Hill and activists outside the Hill," says Taylor. "We put a lot of time and attention on those relationships." Pingree agrees: "Things always work best when you have an inside/outside strategy."

The incentives on Capitol Hill push toward risk aversion, minimalism and conservatism. The job of progressive activists, as PCCC understands it, is to alter those incentives and encourage those who go out on a limb. "Members want to be bold," says Taylor, "and they need to know they have grassroots constituent support."

CHRISTOPHER HAYES

@Nation.com

The circumstances surrounding the death of Georgian luge slider Nodar Kumaritashvili expose the International Olympic Committee charter as a lie, writes Dave Zirin in **Blood on the Tracks**.

Is This the Next Indiana Senator? A slideshow of candidates most likely to replace Evan Bayh.

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The Nation has a rich history of publishing reporting on and from the civil rights movement. We've collected articles from the magazine's archive, dating back to 1865, and present them in the slideshow **Civil Rights in *The Nation*,** featuring some of the most important benchmarks in African-American history.

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Ten Things.

Ten Things You Can Do to Shrink Your Carbon Footprint

Most environmentalists agree that government, with its power to regulate, is critical in finding and enforcing solutions to global warming. But consumers represent 70 percent of US economic activity—indeed, the average American's carbon footprint is twenty metric tons, five times the global average. Individuals can be a powerful engine for change by demanding green products and reducing consumption of fossil fuels. This can make you healthier and save you money too, says Mindy Pennybacker, editor of GreenerPenny.com and author of *Do One Green Thing: Saving the Earth Through Simple, Everyday Choices*, to be published in March. Here are some of her recommendations for small steps that make a big difference.

1 Use less paper, and replace paper towels and napkins with reusable cloths. Buy recycled products containing at least 30 percent postconsumer waste and bearing the Forest Stewardship Council logo, which means they come from well-managed forests (fscus.org/paper).

2 Buy shade-grown, fairly traded coffee and chocolate. According to the Rainforest Alliance (rainforest-alliance.org), tropical deforestation accounts for about 20 percent of worldwide greenhouse gas emissions, more than all vehicles combined. Consumer demand for products grown under the rainforest canopy provides economic incentive to preserve these habitats for migratory birds. Look for products certified by the Rainforest Alliance or labeled "bird friendly" by the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center (nationalzoo.si.edu/ConservationandScience/MigratoryBirds/Coffee and transfairusa.org).

3 Lower your household thermostat below 70 degrees in winter and raise it above 72 in summer. Heating represents about 41 percent of the energy bill in the average home; lowering your hot-water temperature from the standard 140 degrees to 120 will save 200 pounds of carbon a year, according to the Environmental Defense Fund. For more information, see the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (aceee.org).

4 Replace light bulbs and appliances with Energy Star–approved models. Lighting takes up 15 percent of a home's energy use, and regular incandescent bulbs waste 90 percent of the energy they consume as heat. If you replace five incandescent bulbs with five compact fluorescent or light efficient diode Energy Star bulbs, you'll save at least $60 a year, the EPA estimates. If every US household did so, it would save the equivalent of the output of twenty-one power plants and keep smog, particulates and carbon out of the atmosphere.

5 Plug electronics into power strips and switch them off when not in use. Televisions, DVD players, game consoles, computers and cellphone chargers quietly suck electricity out of sockets even when they are turned off. Breaking the connection can save the average household $100 on its electricity bill and reduce carbon output.

6 Eat more fresh fruits and vegetables and less meat—livestock production is responsible for 18 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. Choose certified organic and/or locally produced foods (localharvest.org) to preserve your regional economy and reduce the burning of fossil fuels.

7 Rid your home and garden of synthetic pesticides—nervous-system toxins that have been linked to lower birth weights and developmental problems. Call 1-800-CLEANUP to find out how to safely dispose of these poisons. For DIY nontoxic pest control, see birc.org and watoxics.org.

8 Water-efficient fixtures like faucet aerators, shower heads and low-flow toilets can save households thousands of gallons a year, the EPA says (epa.gov/watersense).

9 Cut back on plastics. They clutter the environment, and they're made from petroleum, a nonrenewable resource. Many also contain toxic bisphenol-a (BPA) and phthalates, which can migrate into food, water and baby formula. Keep vinyl, which has been linked to reproductive and developmental problems as well as cancer, out of your household. For more information, go to greenerpenny.com.

10 Drive less, and drive sensibly. We can't all afford a hybrid car, but many other cars get nearly as good mileage. Save on fuel and greenhouse gas emissions by following the speed limit and keeping your engine tuned and tires properly inflated. For more information go to the Union of Concerned Scientists (ucsusa.org).

CONCEIVED BY WALTER MOSLEY with research by Rae Gomes

"Ten Things" is a monthly feature. Readers who wish to propose ideas for it should e-mail NationTenThings@gmail.com.

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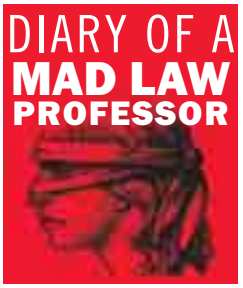
Patricia J. Williams

Convergences

Train stations are a great place from which to survey the world of this wintry economic landscape. Ever-increasing numbers of Americans gather in their shelter, the well-heeled to avoid airline delays, the homeless for their warmth. Train stations are some of the few places left in America where a full spectrum of citizens—rich, poor, high, low—sit side by side, cheek by jowl.

Last week I had to go from Washington to Boston. I settled in to wait at Gate J of Union Station with my knitting and a book of crossword puzzles. A woman who had seemingly donned everything she owns sat down two seats away from me. She was wearing a linty black knit cap drawn over short dreadlocks, an oversize stained sweatshirt and baggy maroon trousers. She carried several smudged and well-worn shopping bags, which she arranged in a semicircle at her feet, and she began talking to them, commiserating about the terrible state of the world. Her tone was gentle, conversational, light. At first I thought she was speaking on a cellphone—there were polite pauses in what she said, moments of agreement and playfulness—but in fact she was not.



She mourned the loss of democratic process in the Senate, the rise of mercenary armies and agribusiness as well as the concentration of corporate power in the manufacture of butter and detergents. ("It looks like there are a thousand brands on the shelves, but in fact they're all owned by one or two multinationals.") She feared the social consequences of the financial crisis: "Things that should protect our economy… the Robinson-Patman Act… They're so busy undoing that—that undoing will *be* our undoing…"

Genius? Insanity? Either way, her observations threw me for a loop—they were illuminating, mesmerizing, shocking, dislocating. I dug my iPhone from my bag and Googled the Robinson-Patman Act. In some other universe, I used to know what it said.

As the tiny blue screen fluttered and winked to life in its search for meaning, I gazed about the waiting area of Gate J. Nearly everyone was similarly engaged with their cyberspacial phylacteries, davening into thin air, entranced, uttering streams of words that echoed in the high-domed space like a turbulent waterfall. Unlike the woman next to me, however, they all seemed to be deploying visible Bluetooth devices or earplugs affixed to their heads, their eyes flat, inwardly transfixed.

Fifteen years ago, I suppose, the place would have seemed like a ward at Bellevue. A well-dressed man across from me was enunciating loudly about having to reschedule a game of handball. A woman with a messily overstuffed briefcase had her head cocked like an eager spaniel's in order to keep her phone tucked in the hollow between shoulder and neck; she murmured over and over, "Uh-huh… uh-huh… uh-huh… uh-huh," like a series of involuntary spasms. A college student in a porkpie hat congratulated a friend on his recent engagement and promised to throw him a bachelor party with lots of "juicy, big-lipped prostitutes, dude." A guy in a hoodie and mud-spattered Timberland boots was waxing lively about "some people" who don't want to "move their fat butts and work." Not on a cellphone was the exception—a wiry child of about 10 with alarming, much too bright eyes, darting up and down the aisles seeking "a dollar for food."

Fifteen years ago, it was still springtime in America. The thought of a recession as deep as ours crossed few minds outside the more perspicacious—some said paranoid—quadrants of academia and, of course, the perpetually redlined limits of inner cities. In contrast, the present-day waiting room at Union Station was ablaze with the semaphores of legitimacy, exhaustion, the absurd. My head spun with fatigue and the roaring heteroglossia. Next to me, the woman in the linty hat was telling the same story over and over: she moved so fluently among the disappointments of commerce, politics, law enforcement and grammatical apocalypse ("You need to end that sentence with a question mark, young lady!"). I struggled to track the coherence in her constantly disrupted narrative.

An amiable security guard strolled by. He nudged at the woman's circle of bags with his shoe and told her to move along. She gathered her belongings, the flow of her words never ceasing. There was a particularly intriguing riff about the police having killed her, followed by a soft, wise little laugh: "But you can't let your kin kill you either." Then, still addressing the epistemic gatekeeper within, she offered shyly, "You are very well liked." "Thanks," she responded brightly and shuffled off.

The District of Columbia suffers the highest percentage of homelessness in the nation. African-Americans, veterans and the mentally ill are disproportionately represented among their ranks. As the foreclosure crisis spreads, incrementally leveling this unfortunate playing field, non-African-Americans, nonveterans and the certifiably sane struggle madly to distinguish themselves from the usual narratives of poverty: laziness, lack of qualifications, bad choices. A determined dis-identification with the already internally displaced has edged into our national parlance, with a host of predictable resentments. The possibility that we, the broad collective of people, are sinking into a communal financial ooze is underestimated, rationalized as the fault of the ones who sank first. From Fox News to the blogosphere, such analysis focuses on blaming those on the bottom for being too heavy, weighing too much and generally dragging the rest down.

In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault wrote, "If, now, we try to assign a value, in and of itself, outside its relations with the dream and with error, to classical unreason, we must understand it not as reason diseased, or as reason lost or alienated, but quite simply as *reason dazzled*." By the same token, the failure to see our common fate defines a dangerously bedazzling split between spirit and logic; between poetry and engineering; between the messiness of mercy and, ultimately, the orderliness of law. ■

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Eric Alterman

Semites and 'Anti-Semites'

As I've noted in this space before, the racist anti-Arab rants by *New Republic* editor in chief/owner Martin Peretz have undermined not only his magazine's reputation for liberalism but also the term "pro-Israel" itself. What I have not addressed, however, is the manner in which the magazine, no less cynically and purposefully, confuses the issue of anti-Semitism by deploying it for political purposes to try to silence those with opposing views about Israel and the Palestinians. Recent targets have included Jimmy Carter, Wes Clark, Juan Cole and the political scientists Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer. This tendency has finally spilled into polite discussion now that the magazine has turned on one of its own: former editor, and now *Atlantic Monthly* blogger, Andrew Sullivan.

At first glance, the episode appeared to offer a kind of rough justice. For Sullivan is no stranger to this very same tactic, having made it against yours truly, going so far as to compare something I once wrote to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This was in addition to his infamous "Fifth Column" accusation against "the decadent Left in its enclaves on the coasts," as well as the outright lie that Susan Sontag and I had already announced our opposition to a US military response to 9/11, which, in fact, we both supported. (True to form, he has never apologized, or even admitted the falsehood of his claim.)

While many of the people who've commented on the Sullivan contretemps have focused on the pathos of the event—his accuser, *TNR*'s legendary literary editor, Leon Wieseltier, was once his mentor—its true significance lies in its demonstration of the diminution of the accusation. Once upon a time, being accused of anti-Semitism over thousands and thousands of words in what was America's most prestigious liberal publication by its most imposing intellectual voice would engender severe consequences, personal and political, particularly in a field so well populated by Jews. But as far as I can tell, Wieseltier's attack is having the opposite effect. Sullivan has been turned into a kind of free speech hero. "We're the cops," Wieseltier said to me roughly twenty years ago when discussing the magazine's role in policing arguments over Israel. Given the response to this particular arrest, it appears long past time for those associated with *TNR* to turn in their badges.

So far, virtually the only journalistically significant voices to join in Sullivan's persecution are those of *TNR* senior editor Jonathan Chait and *The Atlantic*'s Jeffrey Goldberg, who enjoy regular appearances in Wieseltier's pages. To be fair, both writers distance themselves from the accusation of anti-Jewish animus. But rather than focus on the injustice of leveling so disturbing an allegation on the basis of all but imaginary evidence, each felt the need to devote most of his comments to a critique of Sullivan for what they deem to be his transgression of the boundaries of acceptable criticism of Israel.

Most of those who've commented find the episode merely bewildering. For instance, much of Wieseltier's initial essay is devoted to Sullivan's use, in a blog post, of a 1944 quote by W.H. Auden, in which he remarked to Ursula Niebuhr, "Trying to explain the doctrine of the Trinity to readers of *The New Republic* is not easy." But while Wieseltier professes to detect evidence of anti-Semitism in the quote, it turns out that the very same line of Auden's had provided considerable amusement in a private e-mail exchange between Sullivan and *TNR* editor Franklin Foer. As Sullivan later revealed—I'm guessing without Foer's permission—he had sent the quote to Foer upon discovering it, and the editor replied, "That's just perfect—and before we entered our High Shul phase even!" As Ezra Klein asks, "Now, I know that Wieseltier has control over his section of the magazine, but surely Foer reads the thing.... Why didn't Foer stop this?" Why, indeed?

Matt Yglesias compares *TNR*'s anti-Semitism campaign to the plotting of Bolshevik justice minister Nikolai Krylenko, who said, "We must execute not only the guilty. Execution of the innocent will impress the masses even more." The idea, as Yglesias aptly explains, "is to put everyone on notice that mere innocence will be no defense."

One can see this tactic at work in Chait's response to the controversy, in which he self-consciously seeks to draw a line between acceptable criticism of the Israel lobby and the sort that derives from what he terms a "revolting provenance." The provenance to which he refers is that of Walt and Mearsheimer, whom Goldberg, writing in Wieseltier's book pages, likened to Louis Farrakhan, David Duke, Pat Buchanan, Mel Gibson, Father Coughlin and Charles Lindbergh and whom Wieseltier credits, in his attack on Sullivan, with the belief "that Jews control Washington."

As someone who has been repeatedly critical of the Walt/Mearsheimer book—particularly its argument that George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq was, at bottom, the responsibility of America's Israel lobby—I cannot help but observe that these accusations, like Wieseltier's against Sullivan, say a great deal more about the accuser than the accused. Were either writer called upon to produce evidence to support these poisonous accusations, each would come up empty-handed. But, as Yglesias observes, truth is not what matters here; politics is. The editors of *The New Republic* seek to employ the false accusation of anti-Semitism to draw the political equivalent of a "security fence" around Middle East debate, impugning the integrity of anyone and everyone who strays beyond it. Ironically, the true victors in this campaign are genuine anti-Semites, who are happily witnessing the weakening of what was once an extremely consequential, potentially career-killing accusation. For to compare Farrakhan and Duke to two distinguished political science professors with whom one happens to disagree is to absolve the former of their respective offenses against truth and human decency. However unintentionally, Leon Wieseltier has done much the same for Andrew Sullivan. ■

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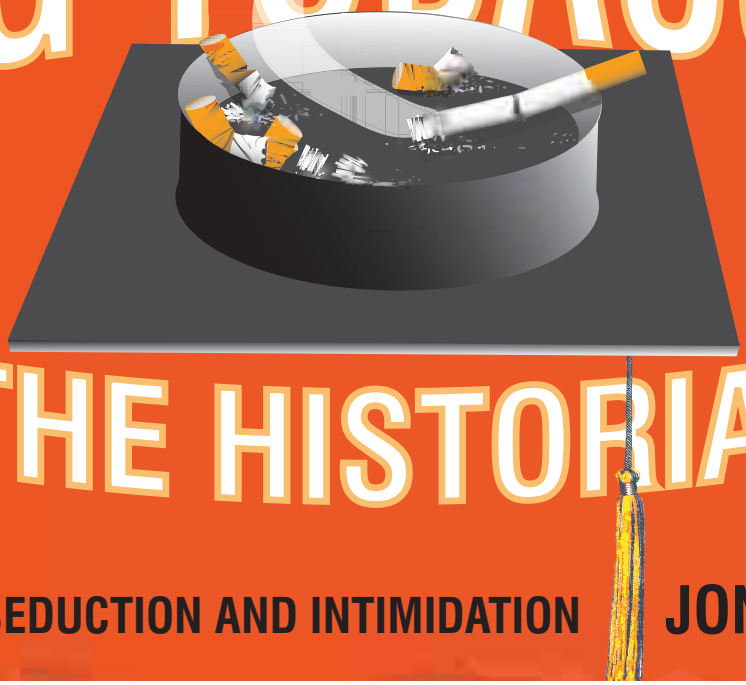
The Nation.

BIG TOBACCO & THE HISTORIANS



A TALE OF SEDUCTION AND INTIMIDATION

JON WIENER

Last summer Robert Proctor, a Stanford professor who studies the history of tobacco, was surprised to receive court papers accusing him of witness tampering and witness intimidation, along with a subpoena for his unfinished book manuscript. Then in January he got another subpoena, this one for three years of e-mails with a colleague, and also for his computer hard drive. Attorneys for R.J. Reynolds and Philip Morris USA are trying to get him barred from testifying in a Florida court as an expert witness on behalf of a smoker with cancer who is suing the companies.

Proctor hadn't tampered with any witnesses; all he had done was e-mail a colleague at the University of Florida asking about grad students there who were doing research for Big Tobacco's legal defense. But he's had to hire his own lawyers and spend days in depositions, defending himself from the charges. He told me he had recently spent "sixteen hours under oath, twelve lawyers in a room overlooking San Francisco Bay, a million dollars spent on deposing me and going after these e-mails."

There's a reason Big Tobacco would like to keep Proctor out of the courtroom. He's one of only two historians who currently testify on behalf of smokers with cancer—while forty historians have testified on behalf of the tobacco industry. In 1999 Proctor became the first historian to testify against Big Tobacco, and over the past ten years he has testified in fifteen cases. He's published several books, including *Cancer Wars: How Politics Shapes What We Know and Don't Know* (1995), and in his coedited book, *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (2008), he examines "the tobacco industry's efforts to manufacture doubt about the hazards of smoking." He's also a fellow of the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

The harassment of Proctor by Big Tobacco's law firms reflects the new landscape of litigation over the health hazards of smoking. In the previous chapter of this long-running story, forty-six state attorneys general reached a master settlement of $246 billion with Big Tobacco in 1998 as compensation for states' expenditures on cancer caused by tobacco. The next year the Clinton Justice Department filed a federal lawsuit, *U.S. v. Philip Morris et al.*, which was decided in 2006 by Judge Gladys Kessler in federal district court in Washington. She ruled that for fifty years the tobacco companies had "lied, misrepresented and deceived the American public… about the devastating health effects of smoking." In late February both sides asked the Supreme Court to review that case.

Meanwhile, plaintiffs' attorneys were working on a national class-action suit, *Engle v. R.J. Reynolds*, on behalf of smokers with cancer. But the Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit limited the suit to Florida, where in 1999 jurors awarded smokers with cancer $145 billion, the largest punitive damage jury award in US history. In 2006 the Florida Supreme Court accepted the decision but dissolved the class and said each case had to be tried separately. As a result, there's a lot of tobacco litigation going on in Florida right now—potentially 9,000 lawsuits. In one of the first of those "*Engle* progeny" cases, a Fort Lauderdale jury in November awarded Lucinda Naugle

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$300 million. Proctor is scheduled to testify in another.

In these cases, history has become a key component in the tobacco attorneys' defense strategy. In the past, when smokers with cancer sued for damages, the companies said they shouldn't have to pay, because there was a "scientific controversy" about whether smoking causes cancer. But in recent years they have given up that argument and now argue something like the opposite: "everybody knew" smoking causes cancer. So if you got cancer from smoking, it's your own fault.

To persuade juries, they need historians—experts who, for example, can testify that newspapers in the plaintiff's hometown ran articles about the health hazards of smoking in the 1940s or '50s or '60s, when he or she started. So Big Tobacco has been spending a lot of money hiring historians—and is stepping up the harassment of Proctor.

The charges of witness tampering and witness harassment concerned history grad students at the University of Florida who had been hired to do research for Big Tobacco by Gregg Michel, a historian at the University of Texas, San Antonio. Proctor learned about the grad students from Michel's deposition. (Michel did not respond to requests for an interview.) "I e-mailed a colleague at the University of Florida asking about this," Proctor said—Betty Smocovitis, a historian of science. "She wrote back and said she was horrified. Said it couldn't be true. Then she found that it was."

The next thing Proctor knew, tobacco attorneys were telling a court in Florida last June that Proctor, simply by e-mailing his colleague, had engaged in an "unethical" campaign of "intimidation," seeking "to malign and harass graduate students who serve as research assistants." As a result, one of the students who had been asked by the department chair about the job had "voiced doubts whether she should continue working" for Big Tobacco. Proctor's e-mail, they told the court, therefore constituted an "improper" effort to "influence, interfere or intimidate" a witness for the defendants.

They also subpoenaed Smocovitis, hoping to get her to say that Proctor had been threatening to "out" the grad students in question. At her deposition, she told me, she told tobacco attorneys that "Robert Proctor never said he would name names, and I don't believe he ever intended to. He's not out to get grad students." She recalled that during a break in her deposition, when the tobacco attorneys "saw they were not getting what they wanted from me about Proctor, they screamed across the table, 'We're going to get him. He's never going to testify again!'"

In the end, the judge ordered Proctor to hand over the e-mails—all ten of them. Nothing improper was found, no witness tampering or intimidation, and the tobacco attorneys dropped the issue—for a while.

In August, when attorneys for R.J. Reynolds subpoenaed Proctor's unpublished work-in-progress, a history of global tobacco, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* said the subpoena had "major implications for scholars and publishers." Ordinarily litigants are entitled to have everything relevant to prepare their case, and the tobacco attorneys said they needed Proctor's manuscript. Proctor replied that forcing him to release his unfinished manuscript would violate his academic freedom, his privacy rights and his freedom of speech. The Florida court agreed with him in a November ruling; the judge held that an author has a constitutional right to choose when and where his writings are published. (In that ruling the judge cited a 1985 Supreme Court ruling that Harper & Row's right to control publication of Gerald Ford's memoirs superseded the First Amendment right of a magazine to publish excerpts without authorization—the loser in that case was *The Nation*.) But the fact remains that Proctor was forced by R.J. Reynolds attorneys to spend time and money fighting harassment-by-subpoena.

And it's not over yet, according to the plaintiffs' attorney, William Ogle. If R.J. Reynolds loses a jury verdict in the trial at which Proctor will testify, the company will almost certainly appeal, on the grounds that it should have been given the book manuscript. "So the issue will be litigated again in the court of appeals," Ogle said. "Then they could take it to the Supreme Court of Florida, and to the US Supreme Court." And since cases are being argued all over the state, "they could raise it again in Daytona Beach, Tampa, Fort Lauderdale or Miami—anywhere Proctor is scheduled to testify."

To persuade juries, Big Tobacco needs experts who can testify that even many decades ago, 'everybody knew' smoking causes cancer.

The same legal filing that accused Proctor of witness tampering also argued that he had "already caused a mistrial…by gratuitously injecting…racial slurs into his testimony to impugn defendants." That's another example of the tactics practiced by tobacco lawyers. Proctor was the leadoff witness in the first of the "*Engle* progeny" cases in Florida, the follow-up to the class-action suit with the $145 billion verdict. On the stand Proctor began to explain racism in tobacco marketing. He started to say that the companies had marketed products called Nigger-Head Tobacco and Nigger-Hair Tobacco—brands that existed as late as the 1960s. But a Philip Morris attorney, objecting that Proctor had injected racial slurs into the courtroom, demanded a mistrial—and got it. The judge ruled that Proctor's utterance of those words was "prejudicial."

If Proctor had been found to have engaged in witness tampering or witness intimidation in the case of the Florida grad students, he would probably not work again as an expert witness. Then there would be only one historian left who testifies against Big Tobacco: Louis Kyriakoudes.

Kyriakoudes, who has faced a similar campaign of harassment and intimidation, is in a more vulnerable position than Proctor. He's not a full professor or a member of the National Academy; he's an associate professor of history at the University of Southern Mississippi. He's published one book and is writing a second, *Why We Smoked: Culture, History, and the North American Origins*

Jon Wiener, a Nation *contributing editor, teaches history at the University of California, Irvine. His most recent book is* Historians in Trouble.

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of the Global Cigarette Epidemic. He's also published many articles in scholarly journals—notably, research about tobacco advertising and about historians as tobacco experts.

Kyriakoudes was also harassed over the University of Florida grad student researchers. His offense: sending Proctor the deposition—which is public information—in which Proctor found the names of the students. Tobacco attorneys told a judge in Broward County that this was grounds for excluding Kyriakoudes as an expert witness. The judge rejected that motion in October. But, Kyriakoudes told me, "since last January [2009] I've been deposed by the other side at least seven or eight times." The tobacco attorneys' strategy, it appears, is to make it so time-consuming for him to continue that he will conclude it's not worth it. And it's had an effect: "I've cut back a lot of what I've been doing," Kyriakoudes told me in mid-February. "They hit me pretty hard, making it difficult to do my research. So I've pulled out of cases. I cut back to one or two trials a year. Harassment is effective."

Historians who testify on behalf of smokers with cancer have been accused by the industry of witness tampering and intimidation.

One more historian has testified against Big Tobacco: Allan Brandt. But he testified only once. His 2007 book, *The Cigarette Century*, won several awards. Brandt is now dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Harvard and a professor of the history of medicine and the history of science. He has not testified in a case since *U.S. v. Philip Morris* in 2003. When I asked why, he said, "That case appealed to me because it was the United States bringing a case against all the tobacco companies, a case on behalf of the American public, a historic case." But "it's enormously time-consuming and labor-intensive to testify," he said. And, as he explained in his book, "I had no interest in becoming an expert witness.... I did not want my scholarship to be dismissed as 'advocacy.'"

Brandt changed his mind, he explains in his book, after he saw the arguments offered by historians working for the tobacco companies, people like Lacy Ford of the University of South Carolina, who "had published no research at all" on the subject. That left Brandt with a feeling of "disgust." (Ford declined to comment for this story.) And he was "appalled" at the defense of tobacco companies offered by Kenneth Ludmerer, a historian of medicine at Washington University in St. Louis, who was an expert for Philip Morris. Brandt considered Ludmerer's testimony to be bordering on "historical malpractice" because he "has never published on the history of tobacco, on lung cancer, on the impact of tobacco on health, or on the industry's claims about smoking and health." So Brandt agreed to testify for the government in *U.S. v. Philip Morris*.

When I asked Ludmerer about Brandt's criticism of his testimony in *U.S. v. Philip Morris*, he replied, "Where is civility in this country? These ad hominem attacks are injurious. I had coronary artery bypass surgery in 2005. I'm sure a lot of the disease came from tension from the comments people made about my testimony. I've never done anything other than serve the public interest." He added, "I was hoping the tobacco industry would lose." But then why did he testify for the industry? "I considered it honorable to stand up for doing history properly," he answered. I asked how much he had been paid by Big Tobacco for working as an expert witness. "Maybe $500,000," he said. (Patricia Cohen of the *New York Times* reported in 2003 that he had earned "more than $550,000.")

Brandt decided not to testify in any other cases because, he said, "I found my time on the stand highly frustrating." The cross-examination and the media coverage left him feeling "a bit bruised." And in the meantime, Bill Clinton, whose Justice Department brought the suit, had left office and the new Bush administration ordered the government trial team to reduce its claim for damages from $280 billion to $10 billion—a tremendous victory for Big Tobacco, which was celebrated on Wall Street. (In late February the Obama Justice Department asked the Supreme Court to restore the $280 billion penalty.)

Nevertheless, Judge Kessler's 2006 decision was a monumental one: the tobacco companies "suppressed research, they destroyed documents, they manipulated the use of nicotine so as to increase and perpetuate addiction...and they abused the legal system in order to achieve their goal—to make money." Brandt felt vindicated but unhappy that the claims for remedies had been vastly scaled back by the Bush White House.

Brandt, Kyriakoudes and Proctor are proud of their work and let everyone know about it, while those on the other side never mention their work for Big Tobacco on their faculty websites or online CVs. Lacy Ford doesn't, and neither does Michael Schaller at the University of Arizona or Kenneth Ludmerer at Washington University. James Kirby Martin's CV at the University of Houston website says he has "consulted on various historical-related product liability and health issues" but doesn't say which products, or which side, he has worked for.

As the University of Florida events demonstrate, a lot of the actual research for the tobacco attorneys is done not by their historian experts but by grad student assistants. Birte Pfleger was one. She was working on her dissertation at the University of California, Irvine (where I teach), in 2002 when an e-mail was circulated from John Snetsinger, a professor at California Polytechnic, San Luis Obispo, seeking a research assistant and offering $25 an hour. At the time, Pfleger told me, that "sounded like an awful lot of money." She took the job.

The assignment was the standard one: find articles in the local newspapers about the dangers of smoking, starting in 1950. "We found ads that said smoking was glamorous and sexy and fun, but he said he didn't want those," she remembered. "He just wanted articles that said smoking was bad for your health." At that point, she recalled, "we started wondering who he was and what he was doing with this. We asked him, but he never really explained it."

I figured out what case Pfleger had been working on and told

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her about it: a lawsuit against Philip Morris brought by Betty Bullock of Newport Beach, who was dying of lung cancer and eventually won a big punitive damages award. "I would not have done the work if I had known what it was for," Pfleger then said. "I'm relieved that the jury rejected the tobacco industry's argument." (Snetsinger did not respond to interview requests.)

In Bullock's trial, for which Snetsinger had been deposed in 2002, the jury awarded her an awesome $28 billion. That set a record as the single largest judgment against Philip Morris. The company appealed, and the court reduced the $28 billion to $28 million. The company appealed that too, but a California appeals court concluded in 2006 that "Philip Morris's misconduct was extremely reprehensible" and that "the vast 'scale' and 'profitability'" of the misconduct justified an award of $28 million—to Betty Bullock's daughter Jodie, since Betty had died of smoking-related causes in 2003. The company appealed again on another issue and won a retrial in 2009, which ended recently with an award of $13.8 million. Philip Morris attorneys have said they will appeal that verdict as well.

'The message [from Big Tobacco] to the plaintiffs' bar is clear: don't screw with us, or you'll be sorry.' —Michael Piuze, LA attorney

Is it true that "everybody knew" in the 1950s and '60s that smoking could kill you? A consensus of medical opinion had formed by the mid-1950s that smoking caused lung cancer, as Allan Brandt shows in *The Cigarette Century*. But the tobacco industry denied that fact and did everything it could to create doubt about the health effects of smoking. It paid doctors and scientists to say there was "no proof" and suggested through advertising that smoking was glamorous and sexy, rebellious yet deeply American. In the late 1940s, for example, "More Doctors Smoke Camels" was a ubiquitous print ad. Despite the surgeon general's 1964 report that smoking causes cancer, the Marlboro Man indelibly linked smoking and masculinity-in-the-mountains for a generation of Americans.

A centerpiece of Big Tobacco's defense strategy is the argument that smoking is voluntary, and thus it's your own fault if you get cancer. That neglects the problem that nicotine is addictive, and poses another issue for historians—what did the tobacco companies know about addiction, and when did they know it? As Brandt's book documents, the companies knew that nicotine was described as addictive by many scholars in the 1940s. Nicotine creates a physical dependency; trying to quit leads to classic symptoms of withdrawal, including anxiety, depression and craving for the missing chemical. But the tobacco companies denied that smoking was addictive. When teens started smoking in the 1950s and '60s—the people now dying of lung cancer who are suing Big Tobacco—they didn't make an informed choice based on knowledge of nicotine addiction. And later, when they had trouble quitting, many followed the advice of the companies and switched to "lite," "low tar" or filter cigarettes—which are also hazardous.

Given the deception practiced by Big Tobacco, how are the historians who work for tobacco attorneys able to blame the smokers? As they admit under cross-examination by plaintiffs' attorneys, in their "research," they fail to examine the most important source of information on the history of smoking: the archives of the tobacco manufacturers and their public relations firms, which are readily available online at tobaccodocuments.org, as required by the 1998 settlement in the state attorneys general lawsuit. These materials document industry efforts to suppress information about cancer and smoking and, in Kyriakoudes's words, to "secretly sponsor disinformation."

In a major research paper published in the international peer-reviewed journal *Tobacco Control*, Kyriakoudes examined the testimony of eighteen experts in twenty-seven trials. He found that the tobacco companies' historians "present a history of the cigarette in which the tobacco industry all but ceases to exist." Research in archives is the hallmark of historical scholarship. The court testimony of Lacy Ford, James Kirby Martin and Michael Schaller, along with that of Nixon biographer Joan Hoff of Montana State, Southern historian Robert Jeff Norrell of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and the rest, Kyriakoudes concluded, "fails to meet basic professional standards of scholarship."

Of course, some historians have refused to work for Big Tobacco, on the grounds of those same scholarly standards. One is Richard Abrams of the University of California, Berkeley, an expert on government-business relations. He said that when tobacco attorneys from the firm Arnold & Porter approached him fifteen years ago, "I told them that tentatively I was sympathetic to their position for the post-1965 period, but I wasn't sure about before that—so I needed to get into their records to see what they were telling the public. They said, 'You can't see our archive, but we'll send you stuff.' I said, 'If you're going to put me on the stand as an expert witness, I can't say I had access only to what you chose to send me.' They still wouldn't let me see their archives, so I said forget it."

Why, over the past fifteen years, have forty historians wanted to help Big Tobacco? I asked a dozen historians on Kyriakoudes's and Proctor's lists. Virtually all declined to be interviewed, including Otis Graham, emeritus at the University of California, Santa Barbara; Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman of San Diego State; and Terry Parssinen of the University of Tampa, who was Big Tobacco's expert in the recent Fort Lauderdale case where the jury awarded the smoker with cancer $300 million.

Michael Parrish of the University of California, San Diego, did agree to talk about it. He said he had worked on five cases, the last in 2003, and isn't doing it anymore. "For doing research, I charged $110 an hour," he told me. "If I was deposed, it was $250 an hour. If it went to trial, $400 an hour. I didn't do it out of love for the tobacco industry." But, he added, he hadn't done it just for the money: "I was a smoker for twenty years and quit. I felt there had to be a little more personal responsibility there, instead of [plaintiffs] putting all the blame on the tobacco companies."

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But money seems to be the main inducement—at least that was the pitch when Michael Schaller invited me to work as an expert for the tobacco companies in 2005. He called it "a lucrative consulting opportunity." (I declined.)

Historians earn big money working for Big Tobacco: Stephen Ambrose, who taught at the University of New Orleans and was famous for writing bestsellers about D-Day, Lewis and Clark, and Eisenhower as a World War II general, was asked in a deposition why he was testifying for the companies. His answer was brief: "for compensation." Tobacco companies paid him $25,000 for just one case in 1994, according to Laura Maggi in *The American Prospect*. (Ambrose, a smoker, died of lung cancer in 2002, when he was 66.)

But don't plaintiffs' attorneys also have big money to hire their own historian experts? The jury award in California's Bullock case, for example, was $28 billion. Proctor told me he has made an average of about $40,000 a year over the twelve years he has worked as an expert witness. Kyriakoudes told me he made $75,000 last year. "I testified in seven trials, all in Florida," he said.

Forty historians have testified for Big Tobacco; only three have testified against—why the disparity? Two factors help explain it. First, the tobacco attorneys many years ago organized the recruitment of historians and coordinated the creation of a common body of research. Kyriakoudes wrote in his article for *Tobacco Control* that in 1984, "the industry's law firms formed the Special Trial Issues Committee," whose task, according to a memo to Brown and Williamson, was to develop witnesses who "will also explain" to juries that Americans' decisions to smoke cigarettes were "wholly unrelated" to industry "promotion or coercion." Plaintiffs' attorneys, in contrast, typically work as single practitioners and thus can't come close to matching the organization and coordination of the other side.

They also have nothing like the money Big Tobacco pays its law firms. The reasons were explained by Michael Piuze, the Los Angeles attorney who won the $28 billion verdict in the Bullock case. When it comes to the harm caused by smoking, he said, Big Tobacco is unique. "In most product liability litigation—auto manufacturing or pharmaceuticals—there may be one lawsuit for every 50,000 customers," Piuze said. "But tobacco companies kill or seriously injure one in two of their customers." (That is the standard scientific view, endorsed by the American Cancer Society and the World Health Organization.) Thus they can't possibly pay for the damage they have caused. "So the industry decided in the 1950s on a scorched-earth litigation policy. They would never give up. Never settle. If they ever lost a case, they would appeal. Forever. That's the way it still is. The message to the plaintiffs' bar is clear: don't screw with us, or you'll be sorry. We will break you financially."

"There are 38 million people who live in California, and there is one tobacco case pending in California," says Piuze. "In the entire history of the state there have been eight tobacco trials. That's one side of the ledger. On the other side, 37,000 people die of tobacco-related causes in California every year. That's 100 every day. Have they been successful with their litigation strategy? You better believe it." ■

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Friedmanism at the Fed

How former New York Fed chair Stephen Friedman made a bundle on the AIG bailout.

by GREG KAUFMANN

KAREN CALDICOTT

Ongoing Congressional investigations into the AIG bailout have put the incestuous and murky relationship between the Federal Reserve and Wall Street in the spotlight—and put Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner and Fed chair Ben Bernanke in the hot seat. Calls for Geithner's resignation regularly reverberate inside the Capitol, and Bernanke's recent reappointment was opposed by thirty senators, including Republican John McCain and independent Bernie Sanders. Critics from both sides of the aisle fault Geithner and Bernanke for mismanagement, unnecessary secrecy and undermining Congressional oversight. But neither of them has been the target of questions about gaming the system for personal financial gain.

That distinction belongs to Stephen Friedman, the former chairman of the board of the New York Federal Reserve Bank and a member of the board of directors of Goldman Sachs. Through those two posts, Friedman may have had access to privileged information about the extent of Goldman's exposure to AIG and the opportunity to profit from the Fed's bailout of the beleaguered insurance giant. While he was serving on both boards, Friedman purchased 52,600 shares of Goldman stock, more than doubling the number of shares he owned. These purchases have since risen millions of dollars in value—and raised allegations of insider trading.

Friedman's purchases were exposed by the *Wall Street Journal* in early May 2009, and within days he resigned as chair of the New York Fed. His resignation letter claimed that although he had acted "in compliance with the rules," the suggestion of impropriety had become a "distraction" from the important work of the Federal Reserve. In a press release, New York Fed executive vice president and general counsel Thomas Baxter also said that Friedman's acquisition of Goldman shares "did not violate any Federal Reserve statute, rule or policy."

But if Friedman and Baxter were hoping to extinguish scrutiny over Friedman's Goldman buy and limit any collateral damage to the Fed, it looks like they are out of luck. In late January, House Oversight Committee chair Edolphus Towns called in Geithner, former Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, Baxter and Friedman to testify about the AIG bailout. Friedman's Goldman deal was a significant line of inquiry.

And now, at least one member of the committee, Massachusetts Representative Stephen Lynch, is calling not just for continued Congressional investigation but for other enforcement agencies to look into possible insider trading and other matters surrounding the AIG bailout. In an interview with *The Nation*, Lynch said that he intends to meet with the SEC to see "whether or not they might be helpful with this." Lynch also suggested that the Justice Department's Financial Fraud Enforcement Task Force should be investigating Friedman's Goldman purchases as well.

A full investigation would not only determine if Friedman violated the Fed's rules; it would also shed light on the arcane regulations and conflicts of interest that riddle the Federal Reserve system, an important public service, since Congress is debating whether the Fed should serve as the leading regulator of systemic risk in our economy. Indeed, what we already know suggests that even if Friedman acted "in compliance with the rules," the rules were inadequate and easily subverted and therefore did little to guarantee transparency and accountability.

That Friedman was simultaneously chair of the New York Fed and a board member of Goldman Sachs was itself a violation of Fed policy. As a "Class C" director who is on the New York Fed board to represent the public, Friedman was barred from being on the board of a bank holding company or even owning stock in a bank holding company. This policy came into play in September 2008, when Goldman converted from an investment bank to a bank holding company (the policy did not apply to investment banks). Friedman was not only on the board of Goldman but also held 46,000 shares in the company. So he had to make a choice: resign from the Fed or resign from Goldman Sachs and sell the shares he owned.

But Friedman did neither. Instead, to allow him to maintain his roles at the Fed and Goldman, New York Fed officials, led by then-president Geithner, asked the Federal Reserve board of governors in Washington for a waiver, which was granted on January 21, 2009.

In the meantime, the New York Fed made its now-infamous decision—on November 9, 2008—to pay AIG counterparties like Goldman Sachs, Bank of America and Merrill Lynch full value for insurance on mortgage-backed securities that had tanked when the housing bubble burst. It was a $62 billion deal, and Goldman was the greatest domestic beneficiary, receiving an estimated $13 billion. Goldman had been locked in a dispute with AIG since 2007 over the value of those securities—a dispute *New York Times* reporters Gretchen Morgenson and Louise Story described as "one of the most momentous in Wall Street

Greg Kaufmann contributes regularly to TheNation.com.

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St. Augustine warned that it is dangerous for religious people to ignore science: "Many non-Christians are well versed in natural knowledge, so they can detect vast ignorance in such a Christian and laugh it to scorn."

On the other hand, Sir Isaac Newton freely discusses the attributes and activities of God in *Principia Mathematica,* which sets forth his theory of gravity and laws of motion.

These examples represent the traditional relationship of science and religion that is too often obscured by the divisive, hot-headed rhetoric and the gross oversimplifications we often see in today's headlines. Long before the shouting and the sloganeering, scientists and theologians have pursued a unity of truth, and most theologians have agreed with the advice of Galileo's colleague, Cardinal Baronio, that the Bible "tells us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go."

Once we understand this, we have a new perspective on many present-day controversies. The current antievolution furor, for example, centers on the fixation that Genesis 1 should be taken literally, an issue that had been resolved by theologians long ago. Professor Principe deems it "astonishingly trivial," and shows how science gives theologians powerful tools for enriching, not contradicting, their understanding of ultimate truths.

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Dr. Lawrence M. Principe is Professor of the History of Science and Technology, and Professor of Chemistry at Johns Hopkins University. He received a Ph.D. in Organic Chemistry from Indiana University and a Ph.D. in the History of Science from Johns Hopkins University. He has won several Johns Hopkins teaching awards and the 2004 Francis Bacon Prize from the California Institute of Technology.

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history"—until the Fed stepped in and sided with Goldman.

Despite demands from Congress and the media, neither the Fed nor AIG disclosed the names of the banks or the amount of money each had received through the bailout until March 15, 2009, when AIG finally did so. While the public was left in the dark, Friedman nearly doubled his Goldman holdings by purchasing 37,300 shares for about $3 million. Friedman made that purchase on December 17, 2008, just over a month after the Fed decided to pay Goldman and the other banks full value for the insurance on mortgage-backed securities. Since he had yet to receive the waiver, his purchase of additional shares occurred at a moment when he was still prohibited from owning the shares he already possessed and was thus out of compliance with Fed policy.

On January 22, 2009—just one day after the Federal Reserve granted Friedman the waiver—he purchased another 15,300 shares of Goldman. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the "million-dollar purchase brought his holdings to 98,600 shares." On March 16, 2009—one day after the public was finally told the identities of the banks and the amount of money each had received from the Fed—Goldman was trading at approximately $94 per share. A week later the stock price had risen to just under $112. As of late February Friedman had gains of approximately $4.2 million on those post-bailout stock purchases.

Friedman never informed the Fed of his intention to buy more Goldman shares, and Fed officials were surprised by the size of the transactions.

The fact that Friedman's actions augmented rather than diminished the conflict of interest was not lost on members of the House Oversight Committee. "At a time when Mr. Friedman was prohibited from owning Goldman Sachs stock, he proceeded to buy 37,000 more shares of it anyway," says committee chair Edolphus Towns. "That strikes many Americans as unjust, unwise and unfair."

At the hearing, Representative Lynch also homed in on that fact. "Here's the problem," said Lynch. "As a member of the board of governors you're making decisions on matters that directly affect Goldman Sachs, and you're a former shareholder, current shareholder, and then you buy 37,000 more shares of that company that you're overseeing?"

"Yeah," replied Friedman.

After the hearing Lynch told me that Friedman was "obviously in a position of extreme conflict and was given full opportunity for inside trading."

"I mean, think about it," Lynch said. "He asks for a waiver; he knows there's a conflict. Then he gets the information that the Fed is going to pump this money into AIG and the positions are going to be covered 100 cents on the dollar. And so with that information, what would you do? Buy another 37,000 shares, baby."

Various spokespeople and others close to Friedman insist that everything he did was aboveboard and that he is a victim of a media frenzy and politicians with their own agendas. None of these people allowed their names to be used for this article. Friedman did not respond to an offer for an interview.

Friedman testified that he had consulted with Goldman counsel before the purchase in accordance with the firm's policy. He also said he was informed by New York Fed officials that "the rules were in abeyance" while the waiver was pending, so he could continue "chairing the board." But Friedman never informed the New York Fed of his intention to buy more Goldman shares, only of his existing ones. Fed officials there were surprised by both stock purchases as well as the size of the transactions, according to sources familiar with the matter.

An attorney for Friedman said he met any reasonable standard one could expect from an investor and that any financial impact from AIG payments to counterparties was reflected in Goldman's fourth-quarter earnings report, issued December 16, 2008. But that report does not disclose the amount of money Goldman received from the Fed. Moreover, Goldman has said repeatedly that the payments from AIG were "immaterial" because the firm had purchased insurance to cover any losses arising from an AIG default. But at a time when the financial system was on the verge of collapse, the value of that insurance could not have been certain.

"Goldman might have been fully hedged, but how good is that hedge if the counterparty in those hedges was not solvent or fully hedged and so on?" asks James Cox, a securities law expert and professor at Duke Law School. One of the parties must have been exposed, he says. "So would not knowledge that the first domino would *not* fall be inside information?"

Perhaps most significant, an attorney for Friedman confirmed that Friedman and other Goldman board members were briefed regularly in late 2007 and early 2008 regarding how much money AIG owed Goldman. This is an important piece of information because Friedman can't claim complete ignorance about how much money was at stake when AIG collapsed and thus how much the Fed's intervention would benefit Goldman. One question that Friedman still needs to answer under oath is: What exactly did you know about Goldman's exposure to AIG when you purchased 37,300 shares in December 2008 and another 15,300 shares in January 2009?

Goldman Sachs declined to comment when asked this very question. According to a Fed spokesperson, Friedman did not have access to confidential information regarding AIG stemming from his tenure on the New York Fed's board of directors. An attorney for Friedman wrote in an e-mail: "The facts demonstrate that Steve Friedman was not aware of any undisclosed material information relating to Goldman's exposure to AIG on December 17, 2008, when he purchased Goldman shares."

Another spokesperson directed me to Friedman's written Congressional testimony, in which he attempts to make the case

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that when he made his purchases, the public knew that Goldman had been paid full value on its contracts with AIG and that it was a good time to buy Goldman. He points to newspaper articles speculating that Goldman was one of AIG's counterparties and on the amount of exposure Goldman had to AIG. He cites financial analysts who rated Goldman stock a "buy." He quotes Goldman Sachs CFO David Viniar on public earnings calls in the third and fourth quarters of 2008 describing the firm's exposure to AIG as "immaterial" because of "risk management with appropriate hedging strategies."

Friedman's testimony reads: "At the time of my purchases, it was widely known and reported—through various public statements by Goldman Sachs officials, in numerous contemporaneous newspaper articles, in multiple investment analysts' reports, and in the November 10 Federal Reserve Board and AIG press releases...that Goldman Sachs was a counterparty to AIG and had been repaid at par on November 10."

But Friedman's claim—that newspaper articles, ratings from individual analysts and public statements from Goldman's CFO are the equivalent of being briefed on what Goldman said it was owed by AIG—rings hollow. The Fed and AIG press releases issued in November didn't reveal that the banks were paid full value. That information wasn't disclosed until SEC filings were released in December, and the identity of the banks and how much each received wasn't disclosed until March 2009.

And what of the Fed's role in all of this? If Goldman really was fully protected by hedging instruments—so that it had no exposure whatsoever to AIG—then why did the Fed pay full value on those securities?

"Friedman's explanation does raise questions about the full-payment justifications offered by Secretary Geithner and others," says Cox. "Namely, that to pay less would have caused losses throughout the system and create havoc."

"These [securities] are in the vortex—these are at ground zero of all this," says Lynch. "They've got huge positions. And what happens to Goldman if AIG is allowed to go into bankruptcy? The market was pricing those derivatives at 50 percent of value, yet they were paid 100 cents on the dollar. There's just no way in hell they would have received that in the bankruptcy process. So here's someone sitting here with this great inside knowledge and capitalizing on it. Maybe it's just too obvious."

The government was so intertwined with Friedman's stock purchases, one can imagine there is significant pressure to move past any questions about insider trading. That's why it's so critical that the Oversight Committee continue its investigation.

Finally, it's worth noting that before Friedman resigned, he finished his job as chair of the search committee charged with finding a replacement for Timothy Geithner at the New York Federal Reserve Bank: William Dudley, another Goldman alum. ■

Rebellion in Rosarno

African immigrant workers have been protesting mafia oppression as much as nativist racism.

by FREDERIKA RANDALL

Rome

Camorra, the Neapolitan mafia. Cosa Nostra, the "dons" of Sicily. Sacra Corona Unita, the mob of Puglia. The 'Ndrangheta of Calabria, bosses of the European cocaine trade, today the wealthiest and most violent of the Italian mafias. These are the brutal, hugely profitable criminal organizations that, as Italians say, "control the territory" in many parts of southern Italy. Meaning that they, and not the Italian state, have the monopoly of force in these outlaw regions: they dictate the rules, they supply jobs (27 percent of working Calabrians work for the 'Ndrangheta), they even look after families in need. With guns as their rule of law, the mafias exploit and often terrorize their fellow citizens—who are reluctant to help the police fight them, in part because they have been co-opted.

KAREN CALDICOTT

So when in January scores of African migrant workers marched though the Calabrian town of Rosarno waving sticks and banners (WE ARE NOT ANIMALS), battering and burning cars and smashing shop windows, it came as a tremendous shock to the frightened, browbeaten locals, not to mention to the local powers that be.

The protesters were the lowest of the low: young men sleeping on grimy mattresses on the concrete floors of an abandoned factory; paid some $30 for ten to fourteen hours picking oranges and clementines, minus $7 to $8 in kickbacks to the bus driver and the *caporale*, the gang boss. Some were new arrivals, undocumented, from Mali, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Senegal, Morocco; some, seasoned immigrant workers who had been turned out of their well-paying factory jobs by the economic crisis, reduced to little more than slaves as they waited for the economy to pick up again. It was one thing to earn 2 euros an hour for a job that pays 10 to 11 euros an hour on the books in other regions. But when some local thugs took potshots at them with an air gun and injured two men, the lowest of the low erupted.

Frederika Randall, a journalist and translator based in Rome, has written on Italy for numerous publications.

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Later we would learn, thanks to the enterprising nonprofit organization daSud, that these shootings were by no means the first. According to the anti-mafia activists of daSud, since 1990 a dozen African migrant workers have been shot to death in Rosarno, and hundreds have been injured—all in virtual media silence. Like Alabama or Mississippi before civil rights, this is dangerous territory for blacks.

"Opposing the clans is a matter of life and death for [the Africans]," says Roberto Saviano, author of *Gomorrah*, a passionate, eloquent piece of literary reportage on the Camorra. "When it comes to the mafia, immigrants are more courageous than we are." Treated as slaves in the citrus orchards and tomato fields of the south, despised as outsiders by the racist, xenophobic Northern League, the thousands of immigrants who have moved into the lowest jobs are nonetheless challenging the balance of power in mafia-ridden southern Italy, Saviano believes. "They don't reproduce the pre-existing criminal system—they try to demolish it." Unlike so many resigned southern Italians, they don't automatically bow to the power of organized crime.

'When it comes to the mafia, immigrants are more courageous than we are.'
—Roberto Saviano, author of *Gomorrah*

For this was not the first time that low-paid African workers have rebelled in southern Italy. A similar riot erupted in 2008 in Castel Volturno, another agricultural zone north of Naples, after six African men were gunned down and killed in front of a shop. Several Camorra bosses were later charged with the murders. In Rosarno, African workers had already staged a protest during the previous year's citrus harvest, and according to reports in the Italian press the local landowners wanted to chase them from town, possibly to be replaced with more docile Romanian field hands.

And chase them away they did: the horrifying aftermath of the Rosarno rebellion was a vigilante raid by hundreds of local citizens in which four Africans were gravely injured, hundreds expelled to detention centers in other cities and their shabby living quarters instantly destroyed. The authorities are investigating whether the 'Ndrangheta played a role in directing the attack. Disobedience on the scale of the black rebellion is certainly a direct challenge to gang supremacy. Some of the large agricultural estates on the plain here are 'Ndrangheta-owned, and in 2008 the Rosarno town government itself was found to be mafia-infiltrated.

"In all the drama and shame of the events of Rosarno, neither the names of the producers who hire these migrant workers, nor the names of the *caporali*—shady figures much like the central-American 'coyotes'—have ever emerged," noted agricultural activist Carlo Petrini of Slow Food in the days after the riots.

Meanwhile, the Berlusconi government's reaction to the Klan-style punishment of the Africans has been chilling. Silvio Berlusconi has said not a word about the events. For Interior Minister Roberto Maroni (of the Northern League), the violence in Rosarno was the consequence of "too much tolerance."

If only there were too much. Wherever hostilities involving immigrants ignite in Italy, they are quickly fanned by reactionary political forces. In mid-February, after 19-year-old Egyptian immigrant Ahmed Aziz El-Sayed was stabbed to death by a group of South Americans in a modest, multiethnic neighborhood of Milan, North Africans rioted, smashing the windows of shops owned by Latin Americans. Although the damage was almost exclusively sustained by non-Italians, deputy mayor Riccardo De Corato immediately denounced a lawless "Wild West situation…for which the Milanese people will pay the bill." A Northern League spokesman called for the police to go house to house, expelling immigrants. The governing People of Liberty party could think of nothing better to do than to organize a demonstration in support of Milan's "exasperated and terrified" Italian citizens. No one considered that the dead man had also deserved protection.

But when it comes to southern Italy, the tensions are made far worse by the economics of the food industry. Those clementines the Africans pick in Rosarno are simply sold too cheap, say some observers here. "With the agricultural system in a crisis worse than any we have seen in the postwar period, producers paid pennies for their produce are forced into dirty compromises, into employing a labor force that is all but enslaved," argues Petrini. "We're all partly responsible: the landowners trying to cut costs; the food manufacturers who buy the bulk produce, process it and wash their hands of the matter; the big supermarket chains that impose whatever prices they want; and whether we are aware of it or not, we consumers are also responsible when we demand ever lower prices for our food without ever asking ourselves how they can be so low." The truth is, Petrini concludes, most of our food costs too little. We simply ought to pay more for it. "Otherwise," he warns, "we're going to see many, many Rosarnos, here and in the rest of the world."

Not long ago, *Report*, a RAI-TV investigative news program, posed the question, What's the right price to pay for, say, a can of peeled tomatoes—that price below which the entire agricultural system is damaged? How much would that staple of the Italian diet cost if the fields were not pumped with polluting fertilizers to produce monster crops, if the harvesters worked just eight hours a day and received benefits? Well above the 75 American cents the big supermarket chains here charge for that can of tomatoes, *Report* concluded. The "Californization" of agriculture—national markets, the impoverishment of the farm labor force, a preference for low prices over quality—is a relatively new phenomenon here and not universally accepted, for farm and culinary traditions rank high in the national identity, and Italians tend to be demanding about the quality of their food. But just as in the United

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States, low food prices (based on relatively low quality, scant concern for working conditions and for the environmental consequences of fertilizers, irrigation, packaging and transportation) have quickly become part of the Italian birthright, in large part because wages are chronically depressed. On the one hand, you have underpaid and unemployed Italians trying to economize at the supermarket; on the other, African laborers working at subhuman wages.

In his high-spirited new novel, *Blacks Out*, Vladimiro Polchi describes a catastrophic day in the near future when the 10 percent of Italy's working population who are immigrants decide to go on strike, mostly just to remind Italians that they exist. Factories shut down, families struggle to cope without the hundreds of thousands of home helpers who clean the toilets, look after old people, baby-sit the children. Produce rots in the fields, bars and restaurants shut their doors, soccer matches are called off, even the parish priest does not show up to say Mass (some 1,500 parish priests here are foreign-born).

Such a walkout—timid this first year, perhaps, but destined to grow—has been called for March 1. It's a first step in making those Italians who are complacent about their own rights and privileges aware that their silent, invisible immigrant counterparts have none. And it's a way to lend Italy's shadow workforce a little of that dignity the men of Rosarno were fighting for. ■

Dancing to the New Music

What will become of the poem and the novel in this new century of rapid transformation?

by E. ETHELBERT MILLER

In a few weeks the Split This Rock Poetry Festival will be held in Washington, DC. This event will bring together poets and writers committed to activism and social change.

KAREN CALDICOTT

The directors, Sarah Browning and Melissa Tuckey, consider their event a public opportunity to hear poetry of provocation and witness. The first Split This Rock Poetry Festival was held in 2008. I was a participant, along with poets like Martín Espada and Naomi Shihab Nye. I consider us to be believers in the expression of speaking truth to power. On the last day of the festival a number of writers walked down to the White House to protest the war in Iraq. I'm certain that poets visiting Washington in March will have something to say about the foreign policy of the Obama administration and the war in Afghanistan. Our poems—and yes, our chants—always seem to be on call. Once again, our New Year's resolutions contained prayers for peace. The year 2010 represents not just the start of a new year but also the beginning of a new decade. Might it be a prelude to the "terrible teens" of this century? If so, what might poets and writers be doing? What do the times demand?

I think our first challenge is "language work." How has language distracted us from defining ourselves as well as our work? Words enter our vocabulary often acting like predators. They circle what we do with the capability of creating havoc. How often have I sat in meetings listening to someone use the word "transparency"? I've become suspicious of this term; as someone reminded me, transparency might be the beginning of totalitarianism. Words are luggage for our politics, and those of us who are writers have a special responsibility to prevent the erosion of their value and meaning. I want to compose poems with words that can wear pants and shirts without creases.

As we witness the rapid transformation of our society, from the vanishing daily printed newspaper and independent bookstores to the declining use of snail mail, what will become of the poem and novel? It appears people will have more access to what we write. This should mean writers in the future will bear greater responsibilities. I now post many of my poems on my blog, E-Notes. My audience is no longer limited to the 500 copies of a chapbook or a few students in a college classroom. I write a poem today and discover that someone has placed it on his or her blog or on Facebook. Is my first concern with copyright, or do I first ponder why the person placed certain graphics around my work?

In December I visited a Washington high school. I was standing in front of students talking about my work while their teacher sat at his desk pulling up relevant material on his computer and projecting it on the screen behind me. I remember how in the old days someone would accompany me on bass or maybe a percussion instrument. Today's technology permits us to create new music. Once again, it's back to how we sound.

Lately I've been listening to the music of Ornette Coleman, his recordings around 1959 and the early 1960s. Here was a man giving birth to the new. His musical group challenged the ears of the status quo. What Coleman was playing was music that would help shape the things to come. Coleman's jazz was as free as the Internet.

E. Ethelbert Miller is a literary activist and board chair of the Institute for Policy Studies. Since 1974 he has been the director of the African American Resource Center at Howard University. His most recent book is The 5th Inning, *a memoir published by Busboys and Poets.*

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Can contemporary poets create something today just as visionary? Must we find new words to use? Should we go back and reclaim the old ones? I would like to find a way to use "utopia" again. What if my new poems resemble text messages? What if the entire process changes—and the way I create? As the world fits in my hand or BlackBerry, how do I handle the power of language once again? What does it mean to be a poet during this time of Obama? If we witnessed a political milestone in world history in 2008, did it have a cultural counterpart? For those of us who failed to see Obama becoming president of the United States, what else did we fail to see? I wrote celebratory poems after Obama's election; in one I tried to be experimental, because I felt it was the only way I could structurally produce work that echoed the times.

I'm more aware these days of how my poetry explores the themes of religion and spirituality. Whereas W.E.B. Du Bois wrote about the twentieth century being shaped by the color line, it has become obvious that the twenty-first century will be influenced by religion. I've noticed already how Islamic and Buddhist terms have slipped into my poems like a sideman with a horn. The Islamic references I used in the late 1960s were an outgrowth of being influenced by the Black Arts Movement and Malcolm X. Today I have a better understanding of the faith, and I wrestle with the complexity of Islamic law. My concern with issues of gender encourages me to listen more to how Muslims are dealing with these matters. A number of my fellow poets are Buddhists, and I find a special kinship with them. I find the love poems I write are often influenced by certain concepts that I feel show a compassion for mankind. If my poems are going to be antiwar, I want them first to address the issue of love. I want them to have the strength to love.

As the new decade unfolds, I find myself more hesitant to recite in public. Too often the venues seem to cater to performance and entertainment. I worry at times about the poems that people dress in Halloween outfits. I'm curious about the politics of those who have decided to wear the mask. Words have the power to disrupt, to destroy as well as to decay.

The poet as gardener must have the skill to plant and the patience to wait for things to bloom. Yes, there can be a spring, but it requires hard work on bending knees. I want to be the type of poet who maintains a closeness to the earth. I want to celebrate what Whitman once celebrated. After all the civil wars inside our hearts, we must accept nothing less. I want to hear America singing once again. I want to dance to the new music. ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

us see that the rock we are pushing uphill is corporatism, promoted by both Democratic and Republican oligarchs.

I disagree only with Hayes's skepticism about the realignment of left and right populism into a new force. It is difficult indeed to imagine coalescing with the hatemongers on the airwaves or in the healthcare town halls. But there are many others attracted to the vague notion of a "tea party" who are neither shrill nor hateful but simply frightened and alienated. The "socialism" they decry is the very corporate socialism that the left should be railing against as well, the socialism that turns trillions of public dollars over to Goldman Sachs, Citicorp, AIG, Big Pharma and the health insurance companies.

The notion that our government would "mandate" that we buy health insurance from a private insurer is the essence of the "protection racket" Hayes presents in such a useful metaphor. Yes, I would reject the anti-immigrant scapegoating that often accompanies the right-wing populists' rant, but I would join them in railing against the loss of jobs because of Bill Clinton's (and now Obama's) "free trade" policies, which have also driven desperate Mexican workers to our cities. It won't be easy to form the new alliance, but that's the soil we have to till.

Barbara Dudley
Oregon Working Families Party

Happy Valentine's Day (Belated)

New York City

I enjoyed "A Fine Romance," Miriam Markowitz's thoughtful and humorous review of Cristina Nehring's book [Feb. 8], and agree that as we lower our stakes with fewer taboos, we drain away the risk that heightens passion. I also find that as we enter marriage later, we become too aware of context and second and third chances. We see too clearly that there are an array of possible life companions for each of us and that any marriage or romance will bring both joys and strains, exhilaration and limits. No one is the one. If poetry is "emotion recollected in tranquility" then as a nostalgic 41-year-old I'm two steps removed from the particular passion I felt at 21, when I wrote this senryu: "Love kills poetry! Neither hand is free to write with two breasts to hold."

Erik Baard

Haiti, Harlem—They All Look Alike to Him

Chicago

Amy Wilentz ["The Haiti Haters," Feb. 8] describes David Brooks's blame-the-victim column. Brooks has attributed the same cultural deficits to the people of Harlem as he did to the Haitians. Bearing the white man's burden, he calls for replacing parts of Harlem's local culture "with a highly demanding, highly intensive culture of achievement involving everything from new child-rearing practices to stricter schools to better job performance." Point being, they're not just Haiti haters.

Michael Klonsky

Ditto!

Kansas City, Kan.

I was pleased to read in your January 4 "Letters" page about the spread of newly coined words. May I add to "Limbecile," mentioned by a reader: who is that fat, loud, arrogant, fascist upstart who wears black and struts his ignorance and ambition to be a national leader? Rusholini!

Ivy Bennett

P.S. Sorry this is not on e-mail. I'm 90 and computer illiterate, but I have loved reading and writing all my long life. Changes in language fascinate me!

Correction

In "Scalia v. The World" [Feb. 22], Michael O'Donnell said that Joan Biskupic "began covering the Supreme Court for *USA Today* in 1989." She went to *USA Today* in 2000, after covering the Court for the *Washington Post* (1992–2000) and *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* (1989-92).

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Books & the Arts.

In Disobedient Rooms

by CHINA MIÉVILLE

The publication of any book by J.G. Ballard at this moment—let alone so colossal and career-spanning a volume as *The Complete Stories*, running to nearly 1,200 pages—is an occurrence that can only be about more than itself. All writers are writers of their time, of course, but Ballard, who after a fight with cancer died in April 2009, feels somehow uniquely, precisely so. This book marks the fact that we are all post-Ballard now: it's not that we've gotten beyond him but rather that we remain ineluctably defined by him. Completists have pointed out that, its title notwithstanding, this volume is not a truly comprehensive collection of all Ballard's published short fiction. Those few omissions are a disappointment. Nevertheless, they are few, and despite them the book is indispensable.

The volume's ninety-eight stories (including two written for this edition) are printed in chronological order of publication, which illuminates Ballard's trajectory. There is something fascinating and poignant about watching various obsessions appear, reappear or come gradually or suddenly into focus: birds, flying machines, ruins, beaches, obscure geometric designs, the often-noted empty swimming pools. That the earlier stories are on the whole less compelling than the later, and more numerous, suggests a career-long process of distillation, a rendering-down. Both in facility and insight, early works such as the wincingly punning "Prima Belladonna"—the first of many journeys to Vermilion Sands, an artists' colony-cum-fading seaside resort supposedly somewhere in the real world though full of impossibilities and dream technologies—or "Now: Zero" and "Track 12," rather overwrought Dahl-esque tales of the unexpected, are slight compared with the later dense and strange forensics. Many of the stories function as testing grounds for Ballard's novels. For the admirer of his longer work there is the slightly disconcerting pleasure of déjà vu, of stumbling into précis and dry runs. Here are various aspects of *Empire of the Sun*, *Crash*, *The Crystal World*. This book is a valedictory, an event, the ground-laying for investigations.

ADRIAN BELLESGUARD

The Complete Stories of J.G. Ballard
By J.G. Ballard.
Introduction by Martin Amis.
Norton. 1,199 pp. $35.

Still, among what must be considered these mostly minor early Ballards, enjoyable-enough exercises pegged often on single ideas or images ("Chronopolis": what if timekeeping were illegal?; "Billennium": what if no one had any living space at all?) are important moments of exceptionality. The relatively early "The Waiting Grounds" prods at the sheer unthinkability of time in ways that would be dramatically pronounced later. On an inhospitable planet, peculiar evidence pushes the narrator, Quaine, to have visions of beings who have slowed their temporal subjectivities by extraordinary factors, waiting for some "mantle of ideation," some unthinkable Godot, that may or may not be a "cosmic redeemer." The epochal, inhuman patience Quaine touches occurs in what he calls "Deep Time." "The Voices of Time," from 1960, arrives like an outrider of later Ballard, with gnostic sigils carved in swimming pools and the pre-emptive evolution—prevolution?—of extraordinary creatures maladapted for the here and now by their very adaptations for possible futures: a frog laboring under a radiation-repelling lead carapace; chromatophagic anemones, preparing to feed in and on a "world of violent colour contrasts"; spiders that spin their own brain matter for varying neurological needs.

And there's "Manhole 69," from 1957, about the effects of an experiment in sleeplessness. Ballard interrupts the relatively workaday prose and generic as-you-know-Bob explanations with an extraordinary image of a shrinking room. There is a subtradition in imaginative fiction about the horrors of disobedient geometry, ranging from John Buchan's "Space," with its nervous dream of "triangular railway platforms with trains running simultaneously down all three sides and not colliding," to, surely the ne plus ultra of the tradition, H.P. Lovecraft's magnificent reference in "The Call of Cthulhu" to "an angle of masonry which shouldn't have been there; an angle which was acute, but behaved as if it were obtuse." Ballard's geometric "planes severing in a multi-dimensional flux" are similarly disobedient, but they do not crush the room's inhabitants or close mouth-

China Miéville lives and works in London. Among his books are Perdido Street Station, The Scar *and, most recently,* The City & the City. *His new novel,* Kraken, *will be out in June.*

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like and rapaciously on them: rather, they change from one everyday space (a large hall) to another (a manhole). The horror for the inhabitants is not the impossible shift, which they do not perceive, but the claustrophobic roomness in which they remain and notice themselves.

More than a quarter-century later, Ballard inverted the conceit with "The Enormous Space," in which a man's refusal to leave a suburban house bloats it until, psychotic, he perceives it as a universe. (In a slighter variation, "Report on an Unidentified Space Station," the entirety of our cosmos exists within one set of rooms.) The pornography of infinity is a longstanding science fiction trope. H.G. Wells, Arthur C. Clarke and Olaf Stapledon, among many others, counterpose the vasty deeps of the universe, the interplanetary sublime, with a specklike human subjectivity to produce a by-now rather well-worn satori of unconvincing humility. (This is brilliantly and affectionately parodied by Douglas Adams in *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, with its Total Perspective Vortex.) In "The Enormous Space," Ballard's skewed fidelity to the trope transforms the banal topography of a living room or a kitchen into something unthinkable, and we respond with genuine awe at the narrator's lunatic Scott-of-the-Antarctic explorations of his kitchen. Whether they contract or expand, Ballard's rooms never change, and never let us go.

Whether they contract or expand, Ballard's rooms never change, and never let us go.

There can be as many Ballardian worlds as readers, and thus many Ballards. (For whom what is the collective noun: A flight? A fugue? An empty pool of Ballards?) Each of those Ballards is real enough to someone, thrown up by a reader who experiences the world through the fiction. Even the word "Ballardian" is now commonplace, enshrined not only in the url of an extensive website of speculative cultural investigation but also the entirely mainstream and eminently respectable *Collins English Dictionary*. But this profusion of Ballards cannot deter one from passing judgment among them: these Ballards must be compared, and some found more Ballardian than others.

Zadie Smith, in a typically insightful and provocative piece in the *Guardian*, describes Ballard's stories as "at once well made, full of the supposedly contemptible components—plot, setting, character—and yet irreducibly strange in proportion." Irreducibly strange, certainly, but the image here of a literature that is "weird"—her word—despite appearing to obey conventional rules of fiction is not quite convincing. No one would deny that Ballard is interested in setting. Like the Surrealists he so admired and refers to so often, he renders setting in an obsessive and visionary manner. With its flat, vivid colors, with or without human habitation, under red suns and in sands, and with its carefully examined and itemized physical minutiae, Ballard's "entire landscape," to borrow a phrase from "The Venus Hunters," seems "haunted by strange currents and moods."

But character and plot?

There is, to be fair, plot aplenty, but on the whole Ballard is least weird at his most conventionally plotty. Particularly in his early stories, the attempts to work through beginnings, middles and ends, let alone with "revelations" or "twists," range from the pleasingly efficient to the clunky. It tends to be despite plot that the stories ensnare, and—I'm leaving aside the brilliant but difficult and overtly formally experimental texts or works made up of an index or questionnaire or footnotes or an invented zodiac—Ballard is at his most powerful when he presents a sequence of described events as if it were a plot but does not deliver anything approaching conventional catharsis or a clever reveal.

One of his greatest works, "The Drowned Giant," for example, is also one of the most formally straightforward-seeming. There are no post-Burroughs cut-up shenanigans. The story opens with a hook—where did this dead giant on the beach come from?—and follows in a simple temporal line from that beginning through the middle to an end, abjuring even flashbacks. But while this might look, at a squint, like a narrative arc, there is no rising action. The mystery is deliberately understated and rapidly tails off into a bureaucratized dismemberment. There is no climax, unless it is the exaggeratedly muted mention *en passant* that the giant's head is missing. There is no falling action and no denouement. A drowned giant is found and removed. Its life and death, the only events demanding investigation, have passed by the time we arrive and remain unexamined. Nothing happens, is revealed or explained. The work is, and surely not despite this anti-plot, utterly compelling.

Character? Ballard the man, from all the affecting tributes, was, if sometimes difficult, loved and loving and fascinated by people. His humor and care have been vividly described by friends like Michael Moorcock and by his daughter Bea Ballard, who in a moving recollection published last year in the *Times* of London ("My Dad, the Perfect Mum") emphasized the "very happy nest" he created. Ballard the writer, certainly when at his best in these stories, seems almost completely uninterested in actual, concrete characters. Names offhandedly recur, with a few tweaks here and there. Sometimes they are simply borrowed from admired figures, as with Leonora Carrington, the drama teacher in "Notes Towards a Mental Breakdown" who, in passing homage, shares a name with the famous Surrealist writer and artist. Many of the figures are deeply traumatized—wives or children are often already dead, offstage before a story's start—but they are not particularly specific. His "characters" are aggregates of intersecting functions.

This idea is overtly investigated, and played for rather dark laughs, in "Minus One," where it is mooted that a man who has disappeared in fact never existed: he has been erroneously believed into existence by an overlap of administrative necessities. That this conclusion, it is implied, is not the case does not preclude it from having real and oppressive effects. Ballard is in no way inhumane. But his fascination with the question of what "human" might precisely mean, his evasion of received opinions on the matter, make him at his best an admirably anti-humanist writer. If a reader returns again and again to a much-loved Ballard text, the allure is certainly not the inner life of the protagonist. There are no Tom Sawyers here. This is not a criticism; rather, given what this approach unlocked, it is the opposite.

In the various reviews and encomiums for Ballard, we meet more unlikely Ballards still. A characteristic repeatedly invoked and praised is his "prescience." It is perfectly true that certain things he imagined have ended up resonating with some of the less salubrious or more distressing developments of modern life. The surveillance and camera-mediated societies depicted in "The Greatest Television Show on Earth," "The 60 Minute Zoom" and "The Intensive Care Unit" have been interpreted as having foreseen reality television and programs such as *Big Brother*; and *The Drowned World*, with its astounding visions of a sunken London, has been read as a warning about global warming.

Ballard largely refuted the claim that pre-

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science is his *differentia specifica*. He says in the book's brief introduction that though he is "interested in the real future that I could see approaching," his works aren't "set in the future at all, but in a kind of visionary present." This is absolutely right. Of course, this is not to say that these investigations may not anticipate some actuality or other—doubtless more than once, in some variably accurate way, they have inadvertently done and will continue to do just that, and it is noteworthy when that occurs. But Ballard repeatedly emphasizes that his apocalypse landscapes are expressions of modern psycho-sociopathology. It is arguable that this is true of all, and in particular all nonrealist, fiction, but if so Ballard's self-consciousness about the fact is remarkable.

Some of Ballard's admirers are waging an ongoing campaign to rescue him from genre.

He offers not prescience but present-sense. To stress futurology as the quality that makes his writing so astonishing is to misgauge the engine of his plots. *The Drowned World* is not a warning about climate change—that is not what it does. And even if it were, where would that leave *The Crystal World*, anticipated here in "The Illuminated Man," an astounding literary achievement in which apocalypse is simultaneously terrifying, unspeakably beautiful and profoundly inhuman? There is, after all, very little likelihood that the world will end not with a bang but with the crystalline coagulation of time into faceted integuments of eternal now-ness that occurs in *The Crystal World*. So has Ballard's "prescience" failed him?

Even more unlikely is the Ballard of those admirers who attribute a Pollyannaish drive to his supposed prognostications. A descendant of the Stalinist insistence on "uplifting" fiction and the Victorian predilection for "improving" stories, this hankering for positivity feels nevertheless intensely au courant. We see it in, for example, the celebration of so much fiction as "life-affirming," as if, even where that is not a tendentious reading, that were a self-evident good. (Might a work of art not be brilliant in its unflinching nihilism, or in its evasion of any such categories?) Writing in 2001 about a different Ballard collection, the novelist Robert Edric, astonishingly, lionized Ballard not only as a seer but as an optimist, a writer whose stories "keep alive… hopeful, needed futures." This is truly bizarre. There is no question that Ballard deserves such energetic, almost flustered praise. But it is difficult to find a single future in this volume that does not require vigorous contortion to seem hopeful. Mass disaggregation from chronology as a societal response to the space race ("News From the Sun," "Memories of the Space Age")? A world under siege by predatory giant birds ("Storm-Bird, Storm-Dreamer")? Murderous civil war and the invasion of Britain by the United States ("Theatre of War")?

Edric is clearly no fool, and rather than simply dismissing his peculiar and misplaced praise, we should consider it in light of his remarks about genre. He goes on to say that to regard Ballard's work "purely as science fiction is to misunderstand completely what [Ballard] has accomplished over half a century." This coolness toward the genre echoes Martin Amis's assurance, in the introduction to this volume, that science fiction "couldn't hold" Ballard. One is also reminded of the way Margaret Atwood packaged her novel *Oryx and Crake* in 2003: choosing as its epigraph Jonathan Swift's remark in *Gulliver's Travels* that "my principal design was to inform you, and not to amuse you," while simultaneously distinguishing her work from science fiction (SF) during her publicity tour on the grounds that SF is about "talking squids in outer space." It appears that Swift and squid are antipodes. Since literary fiction, you see, has something to say about the real world, *ipso facto* it cannot be SF. And though there are many ways a piece of nonrealist fiction can be "about" the real world, when it is set in the future, one of the simplest and most obvious interpretations is to perceive it relatively directly as an aspiration or warning. Underlying the unhelpful sense of Ballard as a prophet, let alone an aspirational one, then, is an ongoing campaign to rescue him from genre—from those talking squids in outer space. (Atwood's phrase has been exuberantly picked up by SF readers and writers, of course: there are now many websites dedicated to celebrating fictional cephalopod cosmonauts.)

The campaign, and the embedded myopia about and antipathy toward genre, are foolish. Anyone who works in SF has had this argument multiple times, and has become tedious in the process. It would be nice if we could all just shut up about this. Clearly the claim that SF has nothing meaningful to say and that therefore meaningful fiction cannot be SF is a tautology predicated on a question-begging and evasive conception of genre as canard. Clearly Ballard was, among various things, an SF writer. Though on occasion he was slightly more equivocal about it, he was quoted after his death on the BBC's *The Last Word* as having said, "I've always insisted that I certainly was a science fiction writer and very proud of it." Authorial intention isn't everything, but it certainly counts for something. To say that Ballard couldn't have been a science fiction writer because one admires his fiction so much is absurd. Clearly anyone who nonetheless insists on this is speaking not from analysis but from an uninvestigated generic prejudice. They, not Ballard, are hostages of those squids. These should be commonplaces.

This undying nondebate has cropped up again not only because of Ballard's death and the publication of his *Complete Stories*. Nor is it because of Kim Stanley Robinson's assault on the Man Booker Prize committee, in a September 2009 article for *New Scientist*, for sidelining SF, wherein he pointed out Virginia Woolf's admiration for the books of Olaf Stapledon and bemoaned the fact that with "no Woolves" on the Booker panel, SF, despite its being "the literature of your time," would be simply ignored. The piece was well put and just, but—as Robinson would probably agree—pointed out nothing new. No, what forces tired loins back to this front is the reaction to Robinson's argument by Booker judge John Mullan, who described SF as a "self-enclosed world" "in a special room in book shops, bought by a special kind of person who has special weird things they go to and meet each other." (It would be infra dig and a cheap shot, of course, to ask how well this description fits the self-conscious literati obediently seeking the latest lit-fic hit at the London Review Bookshop or Politics & Prose.) Mullan's counterattack was so deliberately rude, so preposterous and illiterate and parochial, particularly at a time when SF tropes are viraling and infecting hitherto healthy literature, that it is hard to believe it was not simply an attempt to *épater les geeks*.

If so, *les geeks* should refuse to rise to the bait—except that perhaps being a bore about it is less of a crime than being quiescent. Besides, in the case of Ballard the issue of genre and its relation to capital-l Literature is more than just a nerdy turf war. Certain surprising elements that give his stories their power are related directly to his generic apprenticeship. I'm thinking not only of his use of such traditional SF fare as space travel, the ends of the world and the combi-

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Myths About Israel and the Middle East (2)

Should we re-examine endlessly repeated clichés?

In a previous installment in this series of clarifying messages about Israel and the Middle East, we examined certain myths which, by dint of constant repetition, had acquired currency and acceptance. We looked at the myth of "Palestinian nationhood," the myth of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") being "occupied territory," the myth that Jewish settlements in these territories are "the greatest obstacle to peace," and the myth that Israel is unwilling to "yield land for peace." And we cleared up the greatest myth of all, namely that Israel's administration of the territories, and not the unrelenting hatred of the Arabs against the Jews, is the root cause of the conflict between the Arabs and Israel. But those are not all the myths; there are more.

What are more of these myths?

■ **Myth:** The Arabs of Israel are a persecuted minority.

Reality: The over one million non-Jews (mostly Arabs) who are citizens of Israel have the same civil rights that Jews have. They vote, are members of the Knesset (parliament), and are part of Israel's civil and diplomatic service, just as their Jewish fellow citizens. Arabs have complete religious freedom and full access to the Israeli legal, health and educational systems – including Arabic and Muslim universities. The only difference between the "rights" of Arabs and Jews is that Jewish young men must serve three years in the military and at least one month a year until age 50. Young Jewish women serve for two years. The Arabs have no such civic obligation. For them, military service is voluntary. Not too surprisingly, except for the Druze, very few avail themselves of the privilege.

> "It is in our national interest that reality, not myths, govern our policy."

■ **Myth:** Having (ill-advisedly) already given up control of the Gaza Strip, Israel should also give up the administration of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") because strategic depth is meaningless in this age of missiles.

Reality: Israel is a mini-state – about half the size of San Bernardino county in California. If another, even smaller mini-state were carved out of it, Israel would be totally indefensible. That is the professional opinion of 100 retired U.S. generals and admirals. If the Arabs were to occupy whatever little strategic depth Israel has between the Jordan River and its populated coast, they would not need any missiles. Artillery and mortars would suffice, since Israel would be only nine miles wide at its waist. Those who urge such a course either do not understand the situation or have a death wish for Israel.

■ **Myth:** If Israel would allow a Palestinian state to arise in Judea and Samaria it would be a democratic state and would be totally demilitarized.

Reality: There is no prospect at all that anything resembling a democratic state could be created in the territories. There is not a single democratic Arab state – all of them are tyrannies of varying degrees. Even today, under partial Israeli administration, Hamas and other factions fight for supremacy and ruthlessly murder each other. Another Lebanon, with its incessant civil wars, is much more likely. The lawlessness and chaos that prevail in Gaza since Israel's withdrawal is a good prospect of what would happen if Israel – foolishly and under the pressure of "world opinion" – were to abandon this territory. As for demilitarization, that is totally unlikely. Because – with Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, most of which are in a declared state of war with Israel, at its borders – an irresistible power vacuum would be created. Despite pious promises, the arms merchants of the world would find a great new market and the neighboring hostile Arab countries would be happy to supply anything else that might be needed.

■ **Myth:** Israel should make "confidence-building gestures" for the sake of peace.

Reality: What really is it that the world expects Israel to do for the sake of peace? Most of the 22 Arab countries consider themselves in a state of war with Israel and don't even recognize its "existence." That has been going on for over sixty years. Isn't it about time that the Arabs made some kind of a "gesture?" Could they not for instance terminate the constant state of war? Could they not stop launching rockets into Israel from areas that Israel has abandoned for the sake of peace? Could they not stop the suicide bombings, which have killed hundreds of Israelis and which have made extreme security measures – such as the defensive fence and convoluted bypass roads – necessary? Any of these would create a climate of peace and would indeed be the "confidence-building gestures" that the world hopes for.

Countless "peace conferences" to settle this festering conflict have taken place. All have ended in failure because of the intransigence of the Arabs. President Clinton, toward the end of his presidency, convened a conference with the late unlamented Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak, the prime minister of Israel at that time. Mr. Barak offered virtually everything that Arafat had requested, except the partition of Jerusalem and the acceptance of the so-called refugees, their descendants having swollen from the 650,000 who fled the nascent state of Israel during the War of Liberation, to an incredible 5 million. Arafat left in a huff and started his infamous intifada instead, a bloody war that has cost thousands of Palestinian and Israeli lives. Israel is America's staunchest ally and certainly its only true friend in that area of the world. It is in our national interest that reality, not myths, govern our policy.

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nation of the two but also his facility with much-derided formal conventions.

Ballard dreams up extraordinary situations, yet they create for him the prosaic challenge of explaining their genesis. Blithely ignoring the injunction beloved of creative writing teachers everywhere to "show, not tell," Ballard is happy, where necessary, to use the SF technique known as the "infodump," in which undigestible nuggets of necessary facticity are simply thrown in, to bob about like gristle in a stew or pennies in a Christmas pudding. "The frantic mining of the oceans in the previous century to provide oxygen for the atmospheres of the new planets had made their decline swift and irreversible, and with their death had come climatic and other geophysical changes which ensured the extinction of Earth itself" ("Deep End"). "The outward growth of cities had at last been checked; in fact, all over the world former suburban areas were being reclaimed for agriculture and population additions were confined within the existing urban ghettos" ("Billennium"). Backfilling a story with an infodump can sometimes be vastly smoother, particularly in a short story, than torturously constructing conversations or flashbacks. There is a place in fiction for the unapologetic infodump, and there is something charming about the fact that it is this most visionary, most illuminating, of modern writers who so cheerfully vindicates this most lumpen, pulp technique.

There are other alchemies. While there have always been outstanding exceptions within the genre, those of us who admire and love it should admit that the clichés about SF dialogue—that it is clumsy, unnatural and deeply unconvincing—are not always unfair. At his best Ballard can take something so base and gold it. "I may actually be stepping out of time," he has one character tell another in "The Overloaded Man." "Eliminating the vector of time from the de-identified object frees it from all its everyday cognitive associations. Alternatively, I may have stumbled on a means of repressing the photo-associative centres that normally identify visual objects." But his friend's not having any of it. "The subject-object relationship is not as polar as Descartes' 'Cogito ergo sum' suggests. By any degree to which you devalue the external world so you devalue yourself." Oh, snap!

It is trivially obvious that real people do not speak in such a way. But is that a demerit, any more than such studied unnaturalism is, say, in Beckett? Certainly in its sheer artificiality, such dialogue, like the infodump, might decouple readers from the internal world of the story—by no means necessarily lessening the work's hold on them but barring them from an enjoyably ingenuous inhabiting of it. But even if this is inevitable, it doesn't follow that this would be a problem—certainly not for Ballard, for whom strange cool distancing from extraordinary events, the kind of negative hysteria at brilliant work in "The Drowned Giant," is carefully cultivated. For Ballard, then, these techniques might operate as a kind of pulp-derived *Verfremdungseffekt*, for which he is perfectly willing to breach received literary good taste. He will tell, not just show; his dialogue can be as stilted as a highbrow *Star Wars*; he has no fear of the passive voice. This last choice is one that in a lesser writer might evidence timidity and, as Stephen King argues in *On Writing*, might be used "for the same reason timid lovers like passive partners. The passive voice is safe. There is no troublesome action to contend with." In Ballard, contrariwise, the passive voice is part of an invocation of paranoid totality and helps create a baleful world stripped of human agency in which things occur and are done to things.

Ballard delighted in indulging fiction's blessed facility at having it at least two ways.

Such detachment cannot keep all the world's maggots under control. Ballard's analyses are delivered in a new jargon that evades complete decoding, yet sometimes his acutely symptomatic writing replicates what might better be investigated. It is not an author's duty, for example, to be "interested in" race, and Ballard mostly is not, but race is certainly interested in him. Where there are occasionally sympathetic or intriguing characters of color, there are also groups of opaque "natives" operating as some kind of vaguely threatening social function. In "A Question of Re-Entry," Ballard's revisiting of *Heart of Darkness*, a-rational cannibalistic "Indians" are "prone to these sudden irresistible urges" "like lemmings"; they are "a jabbering pack" whose terrifying behavior is predicated on their category error in—that hoary imperial slur-cum-boast—worshiping an incoming white man as a god. Those of us committed to Ballard shift in our seats and regret that such tropes were not subject to more assiduous skepticism.

Another tradition of much SF—though not of SF alone, God knows, and for Ballard Surrealism is as much a culprit—is an equally unwelcome inheritance. The stories are populated by many mad, beautiful women, dolls and metaphoric lamias (mythical succubus-like part-woman-part-snakes). These inhabit particularly Vermilion Sands, one of the most enduring but, to me at least, less successful of Ballard's settings, in part because its dunescape seems inextricable from supposed hysterical femininity, jealousy and pathologies brought on by male maltreatment and an inability to countenance aging.

These tics are considerably less compelling, because they are more rote by far, than the more outré anxieties Ballard finds in architecture, rockets and car crashes. The most disappointing representations of women are failures of the very estrangement that he elsewhere deploys so effectively. The sheer abstraction not only of his women but of all his characters to varying degrees makes these particular gendered fancies, while by no means unproblematic, relatively bloodless. Most of these women are more iterations of bundles of preconceptions and functions than concrete women, but so—if in less discomfiting ways—are the men more functions than they are men.

There is an enormous amount of eroticism and libido in these stories, and, notoriously, regular fascinated ruminations on pathologically sexualized elements of everyday brutality, such as car crashes. Banal landscapes become littered with dangerous protean drives. These drives, however, and the sometimes gendered gaze that Ballard inevitably brings to them, are, he insists, both more and less than they might seem. In the story with the most famous and by far most shocking and open declaration of lust in the book—"Why I Want to Fuck Ronald Reagan"—the Anglo-Saxon enthusiasm of its title is followed by a dry, hilarious and buttoned-up scientific report. Similarly veering from the overt lubriciousness it had seemed likely to invoke is "The Smile," in which the protagonist, while staring at a doll-woman, gives way to a "wholly unprurient impulse" in undressing her; in "The 60 Minute Zoom," a story of sex, jealousy and murder becomes a rumination on camera angles, colors, framing shots and dispassionate geometric representation. On the one hand all this is (deliberately and bleakly humorous) exculpatory special pleading for the eroticizing (male) gaze; on the other, though, it is not totally unconvincing. These stories, while obsessed with the act and its

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relentless variety, do not become breathier, more urgent, more vivid, during sex. Ballard's cool distance does not end at the bedroom door: if anything, what goes on behind that door seems to be dreamlike and abstract fucking, and it spills back out and affects everything else. Investigations of the pornographizing drive as much as an expression of it, this porn is all metaporn.

For some readers, and I am one, when the late novels fall off it's precisely when this kind of rigorous and skeptical inquiry changes into a more everyday and liberal critique, one that the writer and critic John Clute, in an outstanding and admiring review of this volume, described as "wise we-have-met-the-enemy-and-he-is-us-like homilies." A similar, though less pronounced, narrowing of the horizon is discernible in some of the late short fiction. In "War Fever," for example, the new war in Beirut is maintained by the United Nations to function as a laboratory of violence meant to keep the rest of the world peaceful. Though it appears to be pitched as one, this is no revelation at all, blending as it does the key elements of the conspiracy thriller and the kind of reactionary scapegoat fiction that skewers any utopian impulse with the simultaneously slanderous and banal "reveal" that everyday peace is, the claim goes, predicated on some exonerated violence. "War Fever" reads like an extrapolation of Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas," in which the happiness of a utopian community is predicated on the grotesque mistreatment and torture of a child. Fredric Jameson has described "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas" as a "nasty little fable": "War Fever" may not be nasty, but it is trite. So is the microfiction "A Guide to Virtual Death," a television listing from a future close to humanity's demise, which offers a highbrow pub jeremiad about how awful and decadent it all is and how all that virtual stuff gets in the way of real life. It's hard to imagine the author of "The Terminal Beach" committing the leaden juxtaposition that this bagatelle contains: "Gourmet meals to watch as you eat your diet cellulose."

To be sure, there are much better later stories. But in general Ballard's late-career tut-tutting is unconvincing because the kind of zero-sum choice between the good life and the muck of modernity implied in "A Guide to Virtual Death" had never really been, for all his unerring sense of catastrophe, part of his toolbox. Rather, there was always the sense that the kind of psychotic and ecstatic reactions to the world he depicts are, at least to some extent, adaptive. The prevolved lead carapace of the frog in "The Voices of Time" might kill it, but it is also the beast's only possible response to an unthinkable reality. "The Intensive Care Unit," which depicts a world of people separated and interacting by camera, is—sure, why not?—a critique of the media gaze, of the mediation of society by the screen. But the story also turns for its shocking conclusion on a sense that such mediation is not without its benefits, and its removal potentially disastrous. The violent displacements of humanity from linear time in "News From the Sun" destroy the world but, as one character muses, are perhaps also "a preparation for something, and we've been wrong to fear them." The crises of everyday life, for which such mutations may prove evolutionarily fit, are themselves objects of yearning inextricable from anxiety, as in "The Ultimate City," when a dirty modernity (an unairbrushed remembrance of urban todays) is nostalgically reconstructed. Such stories are reminders of the delight Ballard took in indulging fiction's blessed facility at having it at least two ways. Ballard's ambivalence is one of the reasons he is a diagnostician, not a dystopian, and a brilliant one.

We must mark Ballard's passing, and this is a fine book for doing so. There could be no better candidate. As the legacy volume it sadly is, *The Complete Stories* is more than the stories it contains. Ballard's "introduction" is not really anything of the sort: it is a brief throat-clearing. That is entirely appropriate; authors are rarely the most interesting people to talk about their own works. But one is left hankering for something more substantial to mark this Ballardian moment. In Martin Amis's introduction we do not have it.

It is not a good piece. There are two main faults, and it should be stressed that Amis cannot in fairness be held responsible for one of them. By some unfortunate meander of history, we have reached a place where it is not considered vulgar, tacky, embarrassing or out of place to conduct interviews with other people, write introductions to their books or even their obituaries, all filtered through the prism of oneself. A rummage in the bookshop through the introductions to novels reveals a thicket of "I"s and "me"s. I first read, I first met, I first came across, have always found, have always believed and so on. One can easily imagine, with a slight kink of cultural politics, a world in which the etiquette of the introduction is to start from the assumption that its writer is almost certainly not a particularly interesting aspect of this other person's book, and that absent a strong

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counterargument, she or he should therefore be invisible.

This is not the world in which we live. It is an open question as to whether the source of the collegial narcissism of the existing norm is publishers requesting "personal insight," the writers or readers. Perhaps many readers are fascinated to hear that Amis first came across Ballard at such and such a time and had coffee with him in 1984, or are keen to submit to authority by anecdote, peppered with the affectionate foreshortened names we beyond the velvet rope have no right to use—"I always felt a strong surge of warmth whenever I saw Jim." It is obvious that Amis has lost a loved friend, and he deserves our condolences, but his introduction, as is so common, is the equivalent of leaving the curtains open during a glamorous dinner party. This focus, particularly for this book, at this time, feels a waste.

The second fault, for which Amis is not blameless, is the thin discussion of the stories. Not that there is nothing to what he says: his description of Ballard's "glazed and invincible conviction," for example, is intriguing. His reiteration of the often repeated bon mot that Ballard was less interested in outer than inner space suggests nothing much new, but it is a good bon mot and deserves to be repeated, perhaps especially in this venue. Yet Amis offers little else, no insight into this epochal writer's mind other than warmed-over familiarities. At least the "inner space" line is reasonably convincing; far less so is the trotting out of the crashingly uninteresting nonsurprise that a writer of such perverse and astonishing cast of mind lived in cheerfully anodyne Shepperton, a small town southwest of London. No sooner does Amis mention Shepperton than he dutifully invokes the name Dunroamin, a venerable English joke house-name predicated on a class nostrum about the vulgar anonymity of the suburbs.

It is more or less de rigueur for any article about Ballard to cite the supposed chasm between his environs and his mind. The ubiquity of the notion, of course, is good reason to investigate it in an introduction but not, one would hope, merely to recycle it, particularly since it is such a specious paradox. In the era of David Lynch, of films like *The Burbs* and *Disturbia* (now the title of a Rihanna track), even of a television series like *Desperate Housewives*, nothing is more constipatedly quotidian than the assumption that the suburbs are hotbeds of perversity, sex, violence and other lurid divertissements. Far rarer is the allegation that behind those sneered-at white picket fences, nothing is going on. The notion that the suburbs are really strait-laced, quiet and boring is a kind of anti-cliché, and it only exists as the faintest shadow of its putatively edgy transgression.

Indeed, though Ballard is happy to evoke those unconvincing "neat suburban lawns and the minds of those who tend them" ("The Enormous Space") for effect, his connection to the suburbs is deeper and more perspicacious. He surely had an indispensable role in the morphing of suburbia into disturbia in the cultural imagination, the real conception underlying the pretend-naïveté about the Sheppertons of the city and the mind—not only in the simple and tediously scandalous fact of his living there but in the power of his depicted suburbs too. They, after all, are the souls of his cities and the loci for violence and the uncanny, from as early as 1957 in "The Concentration City" to later in "Chronopolis," "Billennium," "Now Wakes the Sea," "The Ultimate City," "Theatre of War" and "News From the Sun," among other stories. We cannot think of suburban landscapes without them anymore. For such reasons, with Amis's conclusion, at least, that Ballard is probably the most original English writer of the last century, it is a relief to agree. ■

The Bubble and the Globe

by JOSHUA CLOVER

It is time finally to leave behind the long-settled idea of John Ashbery as a postmodernist—but not without some parting glances. Said idea, repeated in various registers rifted with admiration and discontent and puzzlement, has been with us as long as the cultural category of postmodernism itself. Fredric Jameson, for example, the great thinker of postmodernism's logic, begins his first essay on the topic by mentioning Ashbery; it takes all of two sentences. Indeed, the poet's name often seems to provide a sufficient defense for the idea of postmodernism: if nothing else, we insist, it has given us Ashbery. Or vice versa: perhaps he has given us it. Either way or both, it is a close marriage.

But which Ashbery are we talking about? There are at least five or six on offer. There is the dreamy and sweet ironist who debuted in 1956, the year after Wallace Stevens's death, with *Some Trees*, a Trojan horse snuck into the courtyard of High Modernism. There is the fractured and obdurate revolutionary of *The Tennis Court Oath* (1962), a book that helped inspire David Lehman's suggestion that the era of avant-garde experimentation had exhausted itself with the New York School (a chilly verdict indeed on the rest of the century). There is the surreal formalist of *Shadow Train* (1981); the serene mnemonist and *penseur* of *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (1975) and *A Wave* (1984); the prose macrologueist of *Three Poems* (1972). These categories, loosely sketched as they are, still don't encompass the megastructure

JENNIFER MAY

John Ashbery

Planisphere
By John Ashbery.
Ecco. 143 pp. $24.99.

of *Flow Chart* (1991) or the one-off flight of *Girls on the Run* (1999), nor do they really grasp the more casual and gestural lyrics that fill, say, *Houseboat Days* (1977) and have registered Ashbery's room tone at least since *Hotel Lautréamont* (1992).

One could certainly argue as to which of these is the most postmodern Ashbery. The smart money might be on *Three Poems*, given its epochal opening to "The System" ("The system was breaking down") and its proximity to the systemic breakdown of industrial modernity, which any number of historians and cultural critics have dated to around 1973. In its place, we get "late capitalism," the shifting faraway-near worldscape of globalization and niche markets, hollowed industrial cores and fantastically elusive financial schemes, a structure in which time is obliterated and returns as endlessly expansive but mysterious

(continued on page 34)

Joshua Clover is the author of several books of poetry and criticism, including 1989: Bob Dylan Didn't Have This to Sing About.

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SHELF LIFE

by BARRY SCHWABSKY

FROM VASARI ON, MOST OF THE BEST literature on art has been by its practitioners. We critics just keep playing catch-up. But unlike Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, a lot of that literature was never intended as such—not written for publication, sometimes not even written at all but spoken and transcribed after the fact. Van Gogh's letters are the high point of art's private literature, as we've been reminded by the recent publication of a glorious illustrated and annotated edition of them in six volumes (Thames & Hudson; $600), edited by Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten and Nienke Bakker.

Perhaps luckily, few artists have taken van Gogh as a model quite as seriously as did Bram van Velde, the now somewhat neglected Dutch-born abstract painter for whom van Gogh's lesson was, "Now, pain is the only source." Charles Juliet's *Conversations With Samuel Beckett and Bram van Velde* (Dalkey Archive; $13.95) will probably draw most of its readers from fans of the great Irish writer, but I came to it more out of curiosity for its other subject, the painter Beckett admired so intensely, hanging one of van Velde's works facing his writing desk, as if emblematic of his own efforts. Juliet sensitively records some forty meetings with the painter between 1964 and 1979 in diarylike entries that range from a single paragraph to nine pages in length. Van Velde's passion was always to find himself at the point of painting's impossibility and ineffability, toward something like Beckett's famous line "Ill Seen Ill Said." "Before, painting was on the side of the positive, the feasible," he tells Juliet. "I have had to go towards what is not feasible." And again, "To achieve anything at all, you have to be nothing." "A painting is even more isolated, more dispossessed than a poem. It is constantly oriented towards an immense poverty."

Yet for all van Velde's passion and sincerity, reading his views is ultimately frustrating. Beckett could articulate van Velde's "art of confinement" in a way that evokes the opening-up that occurs in the paintings themselves—"an endless unveiling, veil behind veil, plane after plane of imperfect transparencies, light and space themselves veils, an unveiling towards the unveilable, the nothing, the thing again." But the painter seems finally baffled, his words failing to cast light on what is unique in his paintings.

CONVERSATION WITH EITHER BECK- ett or van Velde entailed much "silence. Long periods of silence.... Then a sentence is spoken, and continues to reverberate in the prolonged silence." Their Armenian-born American contemporary Arshile Gorky, by contrast, was apparently a brilliant and enthusiastic talker, albeit in what his sometime pal Stuart Davis later recalled as "a complex personal jive that was extremely remote from accepted English usage." Matthew Spender, Gorky's biographer and son-in-law, has produced a sourcebook, *Arshile Gorky: Goats on the Roof: A Life in Letters and Documents* (RAM; $39.95), gathering the artist's correspondence and that of his family and friends, along with other documents of his too-brief lifetime. This compilation is of great value for anyone who wants to know more, perhaps after having seen the tremendous retrospective recently on view at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, now at the Tate Modern in London; but direct echoes of Gorky's speech and thought in it are few.

Most of his letters concern family matters and are, as his widow advised an early biographer, "of no universal interest." And just as he spent years brilliantly miming the styles of Picasso and Miró, he felt no compunction about copying out a credo from the French sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska as if it was his own or cribbing his love letters from the poetry of Paul Éluard (in Beckett's translation). Yet there are moments of incredible tenderness and intensity, as in a gloss on his "Garden of Sochi" paintings: "My father had a little garden with a few apple trees which had retired from giving fruit. There was a ground constantly in shade where grew incalculable amounts of wild carrots and porcupines had made their nests. There was a blue rock half buried in the black earth with a few patches of moss placed here and there like fallen clouds. But from where came all the shadows in constant battle like the lancers of Paolo Uccello's painting? This garden was identified as the Garden of Wish Fulfillment and often I had seen my mother and other village women opening their bosoms and taking their soft and dependable breasts in their hands to rub them on the rock."

THERE ARE MORE THAN A FEW breasts, all soft if not dependable, in one of the most curious recent books by an artist, Zak Smith's *We Did Porn: Memoir and Drawings* (Tin House; $24.95). Most artists, being less passionately committed to poverty than van Velde was, need day jobs; Smith pays the bills by having sex on camera under the nom de porn Zak Sabbath. Although he first became known for a series with the self-explanatory title "Pictures Showing What Happens on Each Page of Thomas Pynchon's Novel *Gravity's Rainbow*," shown in the Whitney Biennial in 2004, Smith's tone of voice is more Holden Caulfield than Tyrone Slothrop. His drawings are dense and razor-sharp, something like a cross between Egon Schiele and underground comics; his prose style is not quite as well honed, and the book is longer than it needs to be. Still, his view of a world I barely knew existed is funny, surprising and intermittently enlightening, and I'm somehow reassured that a young artist can still rediscover what van Gogh, van Velde and Gorky must have known: that "the only place to put wasted experience to use is in art, and the only place to register a complaint with the very order of existence is art." ■

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(continued from page 32)
spatial arrangements. By now it does not take extraordinary insight to see in this baffling, sensuously abstract and unfixed situation a good portion of Ashbery's poetics.

But the smarter money might be on not choosing: Ashbery's postmodernism lies precisely in the way that there are many Ashberys. A collage of Johns, let's say. The poet is something like a Venn diagram of all his modes, an overlaid spread of common ground and outlying territories, each of those another *terrain vague* of the imagination. He is his own baffling landscape.

But he is not without familiar markers, and these help orient his new book, *Planisphere*. The most persistent is the poetry's conversion of time into space, a longstanding Ashberian trope, which over the years has taken on a sense both of gravity and habit. In the recent work (particularly his superb and moving previous volume, *A Worldly Country*), it inevitably takes on the weight of mortality.

It does not wear this heavily or sentimentally; Ashbery is heroically free of the world-was-better-when-my-body-was-younger piffle that mars some of his well-known contemporaries. Instead we have the sense of the poet (and us with him) being always inside time, suspended within it as within some queer medium (an entirely proprietary substance, one part limestone and two parts prosecco). There is no lyrical leap to ecstasy, to someplace beyond the capacious Ashberian land. Time itself is the worldly country, and there is no other. Not for the living, and perhaps not the dead either.

And so the book must begin, "Is it possible that spring could be/once more approaching?" Well, something is always approaching in Ashbery, though perhaps things come more gently now. Compare this with the beginning of *A Wave*'s first poem, "At North Farm": "Somewhere someone is traveling furiously toward you/At incredible speed, traveling day and night." Now it is an entire season on the move, another season, time flowing in over the horizon to fill and replace the time within which we already find ourselves. Shortly he readies himself for more of the same, "should further seasons coagulate/into years, like spilled, dried paint." We can't help but wonder if this is the paint of a haphazard landlord, long gone but visible in his traces; or is it a Jackson Pollock, trying to make visible life's immaterial process, the time it's made of.

The poem is "Alcove"—not for the first time in an Ashbery book, the poems of *Planisphere* are arranged in alphabetical order by title. That is to say, their arbitrary sequence disrupts anything like thematic development, or the tracing of a logic along its arc. Such developments, after all, assume linear progressions, one thing after another as opposed to one thing next to another, as we get here, time being not a sequence but a place. There is no plainer way to say it than the opening of "Boundary Issues": "Here in life." As he will note in "The Burning Candle," via his well-known drift of pronouns and especially the least definite among them, "We grew up inside it." Perhaps this is the mysterious "it" of the common phrase "it is snowing"—what we are always inside of.

To settle on Ashbery as a poet of time itself, however, is to settle for too little. It conceals the ways he manages, much more than is often credited, to deal with the particulars of lived life. Moreover, it makes it difficult to recall that Ashbery's time is part of historical time, 1956 to now, and cannot be detached from it. Late modernity, if it does begin around 1973 (seventeen years into Ashbery's career, that is), seems to have ended a year or two ago with the collapse of the global financial system and the vision of globalization that shaped so much of our thought.

As a matter of historical fact, then, we must admit that the great postmodern poet comes both before and after the era (not that we have much of an idea yet regarding how to describe what follows postmodernism: what it looks like, how it feels). Perhaps this recognition gives us another way to think about Ashbery: not as a poet of some real or conjectural period but as a poet of the transitions between periods. The shifts of the early work can be understood to foresee, even oversee, the passing away of Modernism and modernity and the onset of the late modern world. By the same token, the work of the past decade-plus, abandoning the stylistics of epic postmodernism, has struggled to reckon with that period's rack, ruin and wreck.

And indeed, the wreckage of an era is on full display in *Planisphere*. This brings us to what is finally so striking about the new book, and so likely to go otherwise unmentioned: it is profoundly topical. It would not be overstating the case to suggest that the poems here are ripped from the headlines. And not just any headlines: *Planisphere*, composed (one assumes) in 2007 and 2008, returns again and again to the financial crisis that is itself the very sign of the end of the postmodern era.

This realization dawns slowly, especially if one has accepted the popular notion of Ashbery that the scholar Christopher Nealon has so persuasively laid to rest, that of the poet as "endlessly elusive…a poet laughing at us for trying to grasp meanings that aren't there." But if Ashbery is not that, he is scarcely a documentarian; there are no mentions here of Bernie Madoff or AIG.

Not quite. How direct do we need it? In "Attabled With the Spinning Years," the poet insists that "In a hundred years…we'll look back/at how we were cheated." This could be about almost anything, one supposes. Another poem starts with "All this random money, committed money," and suspicions start to grow. Could this be money sloshing about in the last days of the boom, about to grind to a halt? Elsewhere, "'It's false reasoning based on expectation,'/he admits." Taken together, these passages start to resemble glosses on the financial dream life and its bust.

Surely the game is on. And so one must consider this as a possible context for "He Who Loves and Runs Away," with its container ship laden with an ur-Ashberian catalog:

> Here come the transistors,
> bananas, durian (a fruit said to have
> a noxious smell),
> baby bottles, photocopiers, and
> souvenirs,
> such glorious ones! Nothing useful
> except key-chains,
> lockets to be furnished, a ball to
> stuff with life.

Again, stuff approaching; we must be reminded of all the detritus and gewgaws that "come clattering through the rainbow trellis" in his '70s classic "Daffy Duck in Hollywood": "a mint-condition can/Of Rumford's Baking Powder, a celluloid earring, Speedy/Gonzales, the latest from Helen Topping Miller's fertile/Escritoire, a sheaf of suggestive pix on greige, deckle-edged/Stock."

But circa 2008, such material has leapt into the shipping lanes, comical but pure commerce, albeit come to an odd turn. At this point the book lays its cards on the table:

> Yet it's hard not to imagine the loss.
> I think, though I can't be sure,
> that all this is being added to my
> bill.
> Woe betide us! We shall never pay,
> though, not in a million years.
> Everything is promise.

It turns out that we are inarguably amid the credit economy—or, more aptly, the American credit economy's abject failure, its bonfire of fictitious capital. As the seeming abstractions and gently archaic interjections bear us

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along, the debts accrue, with the sweetly Ashberian ambiguity of promise—a hopeful promise, but one never to be kept. If it is a poetics of mystery and flux, this turns out to be precise to the situation: "Nobody knew what they owed or how much credit/had been advanced, being incapable of niceties," runs the title poem. The elusiveness of Ashbery and the elusiveness of credit turn out to be the same special effect. Yowza.

Once we start to see the book this way, it can't be unseen: the title of "Default Mode" tilts insistently away from its technological sense and toward real estate (what is a mortgage, after all, but the exchange of thirty years for a plot of land now, the conversion of time into space?). Each anaphoric line begins, "They were living in America," followed by some stock phrase, as in "They were living in America the same old same old." It seems innocuous, playful, a bit exhausted. But: "They were living in America fictitiously" and, in case we still don't get it, "They were living in America extended terms of credit." And even, "They were living in America but it's all over."

And so it is: late capitalism, finance economies, postmodernism. We are returned to the Ashbery of transitions, of a particular America that has gone bankrupt, though the contours of the onrushing dispensation are not yet clear. The poet seems periodically sanguine about this and manages some moments of resigned, ironic hopefulness: "We'll talk about it./Sunset calms, soothes,/rain is toothsome,/and you get all out of debt like that." This is not a new tone for Ashbery, though his mortal lightness and vernacularity grows all the stranger in the context of what we used to call "current events." And something about the future tense is now haunting, the future being so hollowed out.

If the speculative bubble provides one image of the age, Ashbery matches it with his own sense of suspension in a placidly hermetic sphere: call it snowglobalization. It is in this that we float, unable to leave but equally unable to reside there anymore. A paradox, though a singularly Ashberian one: "Ah, but we live in a peculiar era," he writes, late in the book, late in history. "You can't get from there to here."

Can we get anywhere? A cynic might respond, Could we ever? And yet we do get here—here we are, after all—without necessarily seeming to have done much to bring this about ourselves. Ashbery's keenest contribution may be his provision of this sensibility, this sense of drift that is only accurate to the drifty moment, where not much can happen, and does. ■

A Life's Sentence

by MAUREEN HOWARD

"It should have been like a storybook here": these are the words of a boy in the opening scene of *The Lacuna*, Barbara Kingsolver's dazzling manipulation of storytelling. The boy, Harrison Shepherd, is on Isla Pixol to be exact, transported to this island by his Mexican mother, Salomé, who's in pursuit of the first of her moneybag lovers. Story begetting story, Salomé exhibits herself dancing. The sweep of years in the novel, from the Great Depression to the McCarthy hearings of the 1950s, is noted with care. It's 1929: the boy has a pasteboard notebook in which he writes poems and stories, a practice he will continue, a life's sentence. He judges his youthful scribbling is not up to the adventures he's been reading—*The Count of Monte Cristo*, the mysteries of Agatha Christie. Yet the boy writes his own fable of a fish. *The Tragic Tale of Señor Pez* is extracted from his journal, set on the page for the reader; Señor Pez is awarded a noble burial with "everything needed for his journey into the second world."

Reading *The Lacuna* is a fast-forward pleasure, but it's worth turning back to decode the writer's early entries. Kingsolver's grand-scale novel has a mystery built in. Start with the title: is it the luminous sea cave the boy dives into at his peril?

"*Laguna*? The lagoon?"

"No, lacuna."

Leandro, the cook at the hacienda where Shepherd and his mother idle, explains the sea caves of the island as God's creation, though the boy knows they are hollows in volcanic rock. Kingsolver has a fine gift for the imagery of nature. Readers of her best-selling *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998) may recall the foreboding opening passage, set in the Congo: "The trees are columns of slick, brindled bark like muscular animals overgrown beyond all reason.... The forest eats itself and lives forever." The lacuna of this novel is more than island scenery, more than a misnomer or mistranslation. "Underneath the ocean is a world without people. The sea-roof rocks overhead as you drift between the purple trees of the coral forest.... It's a perfect world down there, except for the one of them who can't breathe water." More than a boy's sport, lacuna is the missing text of a manuscript provided by an amanuensis who comes to the aid and defense of the writer Harrison Shepherd. The archivist's notes, discreetly signed VB, reveal that Shepherd had been writing a memoir, noting that "the pages preceding are plainly not from the hand of a boy." We will not know Violet Brown until she is written into the very pages that have been blessed with, promoted by, her editorial guidance.

The Lacuna makes dramatic use of its settings; the first move is Isla Pixol to Mexico City, where Salomé places her son with artsy folks. He will connect to the studios of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, which is more than plausible in a novel that nurtures our disbelief. Diego and Frida are awarded dimension: their fractured marriage and revolutionary politics, so often mythologized, are woven into Shepherd's story. He is dealt a job mixing the plaster for Diego's murals, rather like kneading dough with Leandro, then advances to typist/secretary, all the while recording his hosts' illustrious lives. Kingsolver's moves are as bold as Frida's bright costumes and colors on canvas. Set into play by VB, her characters gain texture as though released from their iconic roles in Rivera's murals. In a staged scene, over-instructive as a schoolroom skit, the assistant is lectured by the great painter of socialist frescoes about the life and times of Lenin. Diego reports on the great loss after Lenin's death, on Stalin's rise to power and his cruel pursuit of Trotsky, "the populist

ANNIE GRIFFITHS BELT

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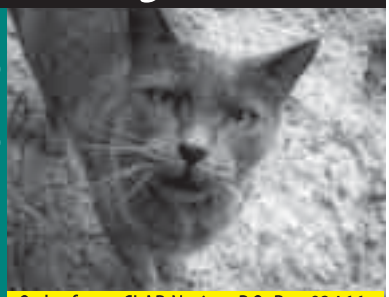

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with scruples." I bristle at his schoolroom summary of the major players in the Russian Revolution, but I'm won over by a clever line delivered by the boy: "It's a good story, señor. Strictly from the point of view of plot. May I ask, what was the accident of history?"

"You can ask the man himself."

Enter Trotsky, now on his way to Mexico—Lev, as he is comfortably called in exile. Dos Passos is sited once in *The Lacuna*. In *USA*, his newsreel bios of the famous—Eugene Debs, Henry Ford, Isadora Duncan—are lively short takes, not Kingsolver's style. She plays Trotsky's role out: the harsh political break with Rivera, his murder no accident of history. The spare apartment where Lev was billeted with his wife, Natalya, the bright tiles of Frida's kitchen, are all finely rendered. Throughout Shepherd's recall, a good deal of tourism is on display—the enchantments of Isla Pixol, bright scenes of the Zócalo, the din in Mexico City. I recall my *turística* view of Trotsky's last bleak apartment, one white shirt on a hanger, washed and ironed by Natalya, we were told by our guide, his small desk set by a sunny window where, in this story, Van, the handsome translator, records Trotsky's continuing works of political philosophy, types out his letters to loyal followers. The Mexico City years are a long and lively entry in this pentaptych of a novel. Shepherd's service to Diego and Lev will indeed prove strategic from the point of view of plot.

There is yet another tour: Frida and Shepherd's to Teotihuacán, where the mighty pyramids of the vanished civilization stand in everlasting glory. Nothing is lost in *The Lacuna*, not the memory of the 14-year-old boy's love for the adventures of Cortés, preparation for the writer's life that has eluded him. Urged on by Frida, who cites his notebooks: "Dumb kid, you *are* a writer." Their picnic in the ruins, somewhat discursive, gives way to contemplations on love and art, allows for her dig at Diego and André Breton's manifesto "Towards a Free Revolutionary Art" published in the "*pindonga Partisan Review*." I imagine the novel's intricate moves laid out in the pre-scripted manner of Dickens's Work Sheets: the boy's American father will remain a shadow in his clerkly DC post; Salomé to be written out swiftly; Van, the object of Shepherd's unspoken love; Violet Brown to the rescue. Before leaving Mexico for the afterlife in Asheville, North Carolina, he will sign on to ship Frida's paintings to the States. His role as an art handler will be much like Kingsolver's in this oversize canvas of a novel, which delivers one further stroke before turning to the years in Asheville: the notebooks are gone. Shepherd's judgment of dedication to the great cause of a People's Republic in the Rivera/Trotsky compound is harsh: "That is the sorest embarrassment: those hopeful hours of typing through the night shift…all of our hearts bursting with the certainty of our own purposes. No more of that, never another typewriter. Accumulating words is a charlatan's career." Then how will Violet take hold of Harrison Shepherd's story, not to mention her own? *The Lacuna* as thriller? Not an improbable solution to the mixed media of the novel.

Turn to "Part 4, Asheville, North Carolina, 1941–1947," where one payoff is Shepherd's continuing correspondence with Frida. His bestsellers have swept back to the time of Azteca, end of empire, greed that ruined a civilization. After he has a good run at success, his own ruin will soon be under way, courtesy of the House Un-American Activities Committee, the destination of many plot points. *The Lacuna* is Violet's book now, will come into the world. Her assembly of evidence runs to headlines:

U.S. Forbids Entry of Trotsky's Body

79 in Hollywood Found Subversive

Asheville Writer Faces Tough Questions

This blotch on the calendar is where VB has been heading beyond her chronicle of the '50s—polio epidemic, scourge of Japanese beetles, the ascendance of Perry Como, Frankie Laine. What a good time Kingsolver has rewriting the HUAC inquisition, assigning a limp line to Richard Nixon; setting J. Edgar Hoover's signature to a letter informing Shepherd that "you have been a close associate of *Mr. Diego Rivera* a person or persons who displayed active and sympathetic interest in the Communist Party," thereby dismissing him from a small public post he has held in the art world. Such trials do not deliver the final scene. That's for Violet to disclose like the prize figure in a nest of Russian dolls.

"It should have been like a storybook here." Well, it is: at his command, the grown boy orders us back to the lacuna of Isla Pixol, Leandro in attendance. Awash in his poetic recall, Violet loops back to the lost notebook now found, to the boyhood fable of Señor Pez. He takes the dive: "A long narrow channel through darkness, a tunnel through the earth and time. *Take me away to another world*." Or, to his death not verified in an archival note. As readers of Kingsolver's intricate novel, we're all art handlers now. Uncertain as Violet, I consign Harrison Shepherd to life on the page. ■

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TRAVEL

CUBA. Three educational trips to Cuba: March 28–April 7, April 29–May 11 and June 15–27 by Global Justice Center. cuba@globaljusticecenter.org.

MATT BARRETT'S GREECE TRAVEL GUIDE: Informative, entertaining, essential and free. greecetravel.com.

Events

NEW YORK

Exonerate the Rosenbergs?

■ "Robert & Michael Meeropol React to Morton Sobell & Other New Developments." Panel of foremost experts, including the Meeropols, Miriam Schneir and David Alman, at the Left Forum, March 20-21, Pace University. For more info, contact the National Committee to Reopen the Rosenberg Case at rosenbergtrial.org, or call (212) 252-2165. Register at leftforum.org.

Cornel West—Live

■ Hear Cornel West speak on the country's problems… and the solution: democratic socialism. March 6, 10:30 AM, Norman Thomas High School, 111 East 33rd Street, New York City. Sponsored by Young Democratic Socialists. Tickets $10. ydsusa.org; yds@dsausa.org; (212) 727-8610.

The advertising deadline for Events is every Thursday. Rates: $210 for 50 words; $260 for 75 words, additional words (above 75) $2.00 each. To place an ad, call Amanda at (212) 209-5414.

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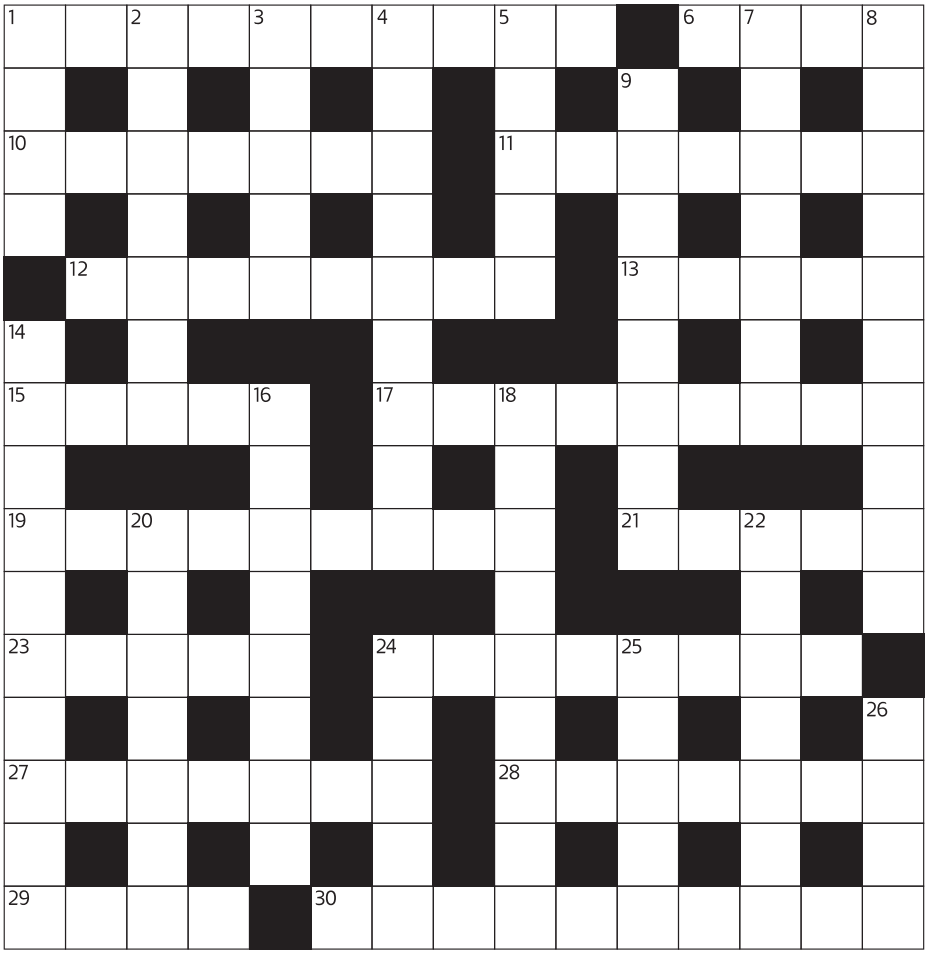
Puzzle No. 1766

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 and **25** down Moving stories, to say the least, about the pilgrims. (10,5)

6 One might worship this backward town where Napoleon defeated the Austrians. (4)

10 Young actress—at least in older films. (7)

11 Poet's musical companion. (7)

12 In favor of foreign wine, a point being abandoned. (8)

13 Building material to take without authorization, one hears. (5)

15 The author Howard's times of no input. (5)

17 One sometimes asks for a little at the barber's. (3,3,3)

19 A place in New York evidently deserted by the singer. (3,6)

21 An artist of the hobo school. (5)

23 Straight build. (5)

24 One might confuse porn a lot where part of the force should be. (2,6)

27 Get too big for one's britches? (7)

28 Nymph of West Indian origin? (7)

29 You're certain to be this. (4)

30 He's confused about one of Hitler's groups, and falls still further around it. (Purchases might be a matter of habit here.) (5,5)

DOWN

1 and **14** Stop classical rescue at the pass, and certainly don't 8-26! (4,3,3,4)

2 One of those things that was shot from pole to pole, in a passage well-known to New Yorkers. (7)

3 Park is translated in two languages. (5)

4 The one in India isn't what modern astronomers refer to. (5,4)

5 Mature, like a Rhode Island writer. (5)

7 The way you talk! Being laid up, and so forth, is bad! (7)

8, **26** and **24** down That's one way to hound the enemy! (3,4,3,4,2,3)

9 Disrupt things, as a way to bring up bohemians at first. (5,3)

14 See 1 down

16 The Air Defense didn't use them to clean things up. (8)

18 The CIA is confused with bits of foam around, and little stains. (3-6)

20 In Germany, it wasn't the common voting type. (7)

22 No. 8 on some charts. (7)

24 See 8 down

25 See 1 across

26 See 8 down

This puzzle originally appeared in the March 24, 1979, issue.

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 1290

		O	V	E	R	H	A	N	G	I	N	G		
	P		A		A		N		E		O		O	
I	A	I	N	T	G	O	T		N	O	B	O	D	Y
	N		I		I		E		T		L		E	
H	A	N	S	E	N	S		D	I	S	E	A	S	E
	M		H		G		C		L				S	
D	A	V	I	T	S		A	M	E	R	I	C	A	N
			N				N				R			
S	H	A	G	R	E	E	N		C	A	R	I	B	S
	E				L		Y		O		A		E	
S	A	L	L	I	E	S		G	R	A	D	U	A	L
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	D		H		R		O		N		T		Y	
		S	T	R	A	I	T	L	A	C	E	D		

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Found! The Last Morgan Silver Dollars

Amazing Discovery Hidden in Midwest Farm Cellar

Indiana. A farmer in America's heartland recently cashed in his long-forgotten savings, hidden away for decades in a dusty crate in his cellar—a hoard of the last Morgan Silver dollars minted by the U.S. Treasury before they ceased production for good, in 1921.

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Originally U.S. Silver Dollars were minted and stored in 1,000-coin canvas bags by the Mint.

Survival Against All Odds

By all rights these silver dollars should have been destroyed decades ago. Government silver melt-downs, including the 1918 Pittman Act, which alone destroyed 270 *million* Morgans, have decimated supplies. Millions more were called in by the government and melted for their silver content between 1921 and 1965. Today private hoards account for virtually all the surviving coins. And of those, only a fraction survive in the Virtually Uncirculated condition so coveted by collectors.

Prized Last Year Coins

These last year 90% pure silver beauties still dazzle with their Mint luster and heft. Weighing in at 26.73 grams and a diameter of 38.1 mm, they are the largest American silver coins ever to circulate. Struck from silver mined from the western Mother Lode, they are the legendary coins that built the West. Master engraver George T. Morgan fashioned a radiant profile of Lady Liberty and a majestic eagle as symbols of our nation's strength and prosperity. Today, the long-gone Morgan silver dollars are among the most sought-after coins in America.

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Silver Trend Chart: Prices based on monthly averages. ©AMS, 2009.

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